

2007

# THE MIND'S EYE

A Liberal Arts Journal

Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts



*Special Issue:*

The Shaping Role of Place in  
African-American Biography

\$7.50



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ISSN 1098-0512

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*The Mind's Eye*, a journal of scholarly and creative work, is published annually by Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. While emphasizing articles of scholarly merit, *The Mind's Eye* focuses on a general communication of ideas of interest to a liberal arts college. We welcome expository essays, including reviews, as well as fiction, poetry and art. Please refer to the inside back cover for a list of writer's guidelines.

A yearly subscription to *The Mind's Eye* is \$7.50. Send check or money order to *The Mind's Eye*, C/O Bill Montgomery, Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, 375 Church Street, North Adams, MA 01247.



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2007

Editor's File .....	4
The Invention of Place in the Du Boisian Canon By David Levering Lewis .....	6
Muddy Waters: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Commemorative Controversy over His Hometown's Symbolic Landscape By Constance N. Brooks .....	16
Transforming Space into Time: Narratives of Place in <i>The Souls of Black Folk</i> By David J. Langston .....	31
Desegregating the City of Brotherly Love: Raymond Pace Alexander and the Civil Rights Struggle in Philadelphia By David A. Canton .....	42
Searching for Ambrose: Genealogy, Biography and African-American Place in the Historical Narrative By Dina Mayo-Bobee .....	55
The Life and Death of William Meadows: Local Government Documents as Sources for Biography By Jan Voogd .....	65
"Like Limbs from a Tree": Home and Homeland in Caryl Phillips' <i>Crossing the River</i> By Khaliah Mangrum .....	73
An Appeal to the Citizens of Academe: Why David Walker and Nat Turner Belong in the Classroom By Mark R. Cheatham .....	82
Contributors and Abstracts .....	88

### Special Issue: The Shaping Role of Place in African-American Biography

This special issue of *The Mind's Eye* includes selected papers from the national conference held in North Adams at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts (MCLA) in September 2006 to showcase the 18-month K-12 curriculum-development project funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), "The Shaping Role of Place in African-American Biography." Richard A. Courage, professor of English, Westchester Community College in New York, and Frances Jones-Sneed, professor of history at MCLA, codirected the project along with Roselle Chartock, professor of education at MCLA; Donald Pecor, instructor of history at MCLA and director of curriculum at Drury High School in North Adams; and Claudette Webster, curriculum specialist for elementary grades from Chatham, New York. There were also more than 20 local and national scholars who joined us. The project Web site can be viewed at [www.mcla.edu/aab](http://www.mcla.edu/aab). An African-American trail guide, *The African American Heritage of the Upper Housatonic Valley*, edited by David Levinson, Rachel Fletcher, Frances Jones-Sneed, Bernard Drew and Elaine Gunn, will give you additional details about African-Americans in the area. Also, there is a Web site detailing the efforts of the Upper Housatonic African-American Trail at [www.uhvafamtrail.org/](http://www.uhvafamtrail.org/).

We believe that the project can be emulated in any community in the country. The scholars' papers use place as a model to discuss African-Americans in various communities. A full roster of presenters and their topics is given at the end of the journal.

We are also pleased to include the keynote address given at the conference by the distinguished New York University history professor David Levering Lewis on "The Invention of Place in the Du Boisian Canon." Constance N. Brooks's article, "Muddy Waters: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Commemorative Controversy over His Hometown's Symbolic Landscape," examines a recent controversy in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, about public commemoration of native son W. E. B. Du Bois. David A. Canton's "Desegregating the City of Brotherly Love: Raymond Pace Alexander and the Civil Rights Struggle in Philadelphia" discusses Raymond Pace Alexander (1898?-1974), who was a prominent New Negro lawyer, a graduate of Harvard Law School and the first African-American judge on the Common Pleas Court in Philadelphia. Mark R. Cheatham, in "An Appeal to the Citizens of Academe: Why David Walker and Nat Turner Belong in the Classroom," offers a much-needed rationale for including David Walker and Nat Turner in the history classroom, as well as including them as part of the legacy of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth. David J. Langston, in "Transforming Space into Time: Narratives of Place in *The Souls of Black Folk*," develops the notion of place to include complex, transformative, historical events, such as education, voting and social integration, not as symbols for permanent values but as ones to which each place must bear witness so as to enable freedmen's sons and daughters to be recognized on American soil. Khaliah Mangrum's "'Like Limbs from a Tree': Home and Homeland in Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River*" critiques Caryl Phillips' novel that shows the distinction between home and homeland and analyzes the politics of space. Dinah Mayo-Bobee's "Searching for Ambrose: Genealogy, Biography and African-American Place in the Historical Narrative" examines the process of reconstructing personal histories and placing them in the context of significant historical events through the lives of Ambrose McCaskill (1844-1920), a subsistence farmer born in antebellum South Carolina, and his descendants. Jan Voogd explores the murder of William Meadows, a former slave and a representative to Louisiana's Constitutional Convention in 1868, and the attention the Louisiana General Assembly devoted to it in her paper "The Life and Death of William Meadows: Local Government Documents as Sources for Biography."

**Frances Jones-Sneed**, Ph.D. (University of Missouri), is a professor of history at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts. She cochairs the Upper Housatonic Valley African-American Trail Advisory Committee. She specializes in the history of African-Americans and is at work on a monograph about W. E. B. Du Bois.

# The Invention of Place in the Du Boisian Canon

BY DAVID LEVERING LEWIS

The influential 19th-century French literary critic and philosopher Hippolyte Taine (1828–1893) stipulated that there are three causal factors to explain national behavior: race, time and place. Taine tested this explanatory trilogy on the Anglo-Saxons with what appeared to be scientific precision in his grand multivolume monograph, *The History of English Literature*. Although race came to hold for W. E. B. Du Bois a connotation more cultural than Taine's essentialized concept, the great social critic for whom the color line was the century's overriding problem never entirely abandoned his belief in the unique innateness of the African-American persona. He would always claim for people of color in the United States a special sensibility shaped by a unique group experience in a discrete matrix—race at a place in time, in other words.

In later Du Boisian meditations nourished by Marxist analysis, race ceded primacy to class, as in the magisterial *Black Reconstruction in America* and the autobiographical *Dusk of Dawn*, wherein African-American uniqueness was distinguished by a historic commitment to and powerful fostering of authentic democracy for everybody. Black folk were cast as the natural democrats of the American experience. They were the avatars of the just society, the organic force behind a decent respect for universal rights in the modern industrial world. "No group of civilized people have better opportunity to forward the advance of human culture than American Negroes," Du Bois asserted at the end of World War Two.

Whether Du Bois offered race or nurture to explain the African-American presence, he embedded first one and then the other in descriptions of place and time of a matchless density and richness. As with Hippolyte Taine, a superlative academic training enabled Du Bois—historian, sociologist and, yes, journalist—to resurrect a particular environment, milieu, place with a seeming verisimilitude that almost

always makes the reader believe that he or she is participating in a particular history as it actually was. After all, he possessed one of the finest historical minds of any American intellectual. Yet, in this great man's oeuvre we find a decided and persistent inclination to rearrange the facts to good advantage, to manipulate place and time in minor and subtle ways, to marshal the narrative in the service of a higher truth—that of the legitimate social and political aspirations of a people historically abased by its countrymen and women. To Du Bois, this invention and manipulation of place and time was an ethical imperative, a democratic duty. Like the Platonic Lie, it truly was meant to serve that larger truth to which all should subscribe—that liberty and justice must trump all other concerns.

For Du Bois, the invention of place begins with the Berkshire milieu of the late 19th century. The importance of the Great Barrington, Massachusetts, period, its imprint upon all that Willie Du Bois grew to be, was deep, and certainly singular. His sense of identity or belonging was spun out between the poles of two distinct racial groups—black and white—and two dissimilar social classes—lower and upper—to form that double consciousness of being he would famously describe at the age of 35 in *The Souls of Black Folk*. Because he sedulously invented, molded and masked this village world to suit his egocentric, if inspired, purposes of personal and racial affirmation, the Berkshire period was variously Edenic fable and racial crucible. The maternal family story told by Du Bois across six generations is one of vintage New England mores seen through the scrim of class and color.

His people were part of a "great clan," he says, of the Burghardts of South Egremont Plain. From Tom Burghardt, property of one Conraet Borghhaerd, is begotten Jack, husband of Violet and then of Mum Bett, and veteran of the Shays Rebellion and the War of 1812. Jack's three sons, Othello, Ira and Harlow, struggled along on the plain beyond Green River in neat houses set back from the main road within easy walking distance of one another. Harlow seems to have held on best. His property transactions in the Great Barrington Town Hall Registry of Deeds show a fair amount of profit from land sales during the period. Othello had the least gumption, or so thought his demanding grandson. "Uncle Tello," as Du Bois called his mother's father, was said to be too fond of the medicine prescribed for a hip injury and left much of the running of things to his capable wife, Sarah or Sally, a handsome, tan woman from Hillsdale, New York. The federal census tracks Othello Burghardt's occupational vagaries decade by decade—1850, whitewasher; 1860, laborer—until that for 1870 finds him with "no occupation" at 80, in a nimbus of pipe tobacco by the fireside.

But whether energetic or indolent, this black yeomanry was grappling with large, impersonal forces, and as Great Barrington's established white families began to prosper, its black ones, Willie Du Bois's among them, were sliding into subsistence. The black families clung fiercely to basic moral values—churchgoing, work, wedlock and legitimate births. "The family customs were New England, and the sex mores," Du Bois recalled. Hemmed in by a racially exclusive industrialism, the whitening of domestic work and their own deep conservatism, they were either like Uncle Tello,

stuporous by his fireside, atrophying, or, like cousin John Burghardt, determined not to be licked and moving on.

The real world Tom Burghardt's faltering descendants made for themselves appears much transformed in the mythopoeic prose of Tom's illustrious great-great-grandson. In those lyrical memoirs, whether *Darkwater*, *A Pageant in Seven Decades*, *Dusk of Dawn* or *The Autobiography*, we are drawn to participate in a chronicle of epic sweep, at once familial, racial, national, global and prophetic. Enchantingly, heroically, each of these works employs the language of the saga. Each alludes to the author's portentous birth "by a golden river in the shadow of two great hills, five years after the Emancipation Proclamation." The place of birth is idyllic and the circumstances neither rich nor poor, but suited in their modesty to the author's large destiny. In local-color accents redolent of Washington Irving, Great Barrington is fairly faithfully pictured as "a little New England town nestled shyly in its valley with something of Dutch cleanliness and English reticence." The house of his birth is "quaint, with clapboards running up and down, neatly trimmed." There is a "rosy front yard" to frolic in and "unbelievably delicious strawberries in the rear."

Whereupon the chords of destiny begin to sound ever fuller. His "own people were part of a great clan." The founding ancestor's relationship to his white slave master is subtly altered. "Sullen in his slavery," Tom Burghardt comes through the western pass, from the Hudson "with his Dutch captor," rather than being brought there by him. Tom's three days of service in Captain Spoor's company become an enlistment "to serve for three years" in the War of Independence.<sup>1</sup> By the time of *The Autobiography*, Tom's son Jack definitely decides his place is with Daniel Shays against the forces of monopoly capital. The "house of my grandfather Othello," that "sturdy, small and old-fashioned" dwelling on Egremont Plain, cradles ten more shoots of the mighty family—one of them, Mary Silvina, Will Du Bois's mother, some time in 1831. Hers is a dulcet movement: "Mother was dark shining bronze, with smooth skin and lovely eyes; there was a tiny ripple in her black hair; and she had a heavy, kind face."

The Du Bois family reality was much different, of course. The Burghardts of Great Barrington were in a downward spiral, with Du Bois's partially paralyzed mother deserted by her enigmatic octoroon husband, and their means of sustenance almost hand to mouth. But if the rising tide of mainstream prosperity threatened some with drowning, in the crucial area of public education it promised a lift for all those with enough motivation. Before Du Bois's first birthday, Great Barringtonians voted \$2,000 to create a public high school. A plain, rectangular building went up next to the old wooden elementary schoolhouse in 1869, the town's second brick structure after the Episcopal church. It would be W. E. B. Du Bois's salvation.

Young Willie Du Bois told himself that race, in the large sense of generalized and congealed attitudes about his people, had played no part in his elementary school

<sup>1</sup> Du Bois quoted in *The Autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois* (New York: International, 1968) 62, 63; and *Darkwater: Voices from the Past* (New York: Washington Square, 2004) 5.

experience. Had he not been cheered on by the leading citizens as he advanced year after year—the sole black boy in the school—more quickly than most of his white classmates? Had he not always felt welcome in the homes of even his wealthy classmates and frequently been complimented by their parents for setting a good example? In the early, innocent, Horatio Alger years, then, Du Bois believed that the differences among people were the result of industry or ability—and sometimes physical courage. “Trowned” once by a burly white lad during recess, “honor” had been preserved by fighting and suffering manfully before onlooking classmates. The Shanty Irish “preferred” to live as they did, he concluded, just as most of the black Burghardts now lacked the acumen to keep up. Mike Gibbons was better at marbles than he, but Mike was a dummy at Latin. Secure in his playground sociology, in which class and race had more to do with character than with economics, the future Marxist theorist acquired a rugged New England individualist’s understanding of social mobility and would be greatly reassured until he reached the threshold of adolescence.

But race was to find a place. With that flare for drama in language in which he has few equals, Du Bois pinpoints for the first time in *The Souls of Black Folk* the exact moment in his ten-year-old life, a spring day in 1878, when the theorems of playground sociology were, supposedly, forever shattered: Here we have one of the best instances of the race, place, milieu dynamic at work:

I remember well when the shadow swept across me. I was a little thing, away up in the hills of New England, where the dark Housatonic winds between Hoosac and Taghkanic to the sea. In a wee wooden schoolhouse, something put it into the boys’ and girls’ heads to buy gorgeous visiting-cards—ten cents a package—and exchange. The exchange was merry, till one girl, a tall newcomer, refused my card—refused it peremptorily, with a glance. Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life, and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil.

A permanent, anchoring sense of Du Bois’s racial identity could have come from a single such traumatic rebuff in the “wee wooden schoolhouse.” Interracial companionship has always been one of the first casualties of approaching puberty. The incident must have occurred, and his account of it is certainly psychologically plausible. Yet sympathetic skepticism is advisable whenever Du Bois advances a concept or proposition by way of autobiography. Often, the truth is not in the facts but in the conceptual or moral validity behind them. In the case of the sweeping shadow and separating veil, there are several versions and equivalents.

Place doesn’t change as much as time. In one, the lacerating moment is replaced by a Chinese water torture of small and subtle insults. “Very gradually—I cannot now distinguish the steps,” *Darkwater*, angriest of the memoirs, says, “though here and there I remember a jump or a jolt—but very gradually I found myself assuming quite



placidly" that race mattered greatly. Another account seems to place the conversion experience of the cards in the brick high school, and the offending newcomer may have been Agnes O'Neil, whom Willie dismisses in the *Autobiography* as a gorgeous dresser "whose ancestors nobody knew . . . otherwise she was negligible." In this version, it was then that he "began to feel the pressure of the 'veil of color'; in little matters at first and then in larger," after entering high school. Whenever the veil descended upon him, Du Bois left Great Barrington High in 1884 with honors and a dawning consciousness of race.

It was mostly because of money that Harvard and second choice Williams were denied him. A year later, with money earned as timekeeper for the labor crews erecting Searles Castle, the outsized mansion of a railroad mogul's widow, and contributions from Berkshire Congregational churches, our New England scholar headed south to Fisk University. He entered the class of 1889 as a sophomore, resolved to study the novel problem of American race relations. If they were going to be his life's work, the Fisk undergraduate needed to spend time among those African-Americans who were unlikely ever to see the inside of a Fisk classroom—among real peasants in the rural backcountry. Instead of returning home at the end of the sophomore year, then, he set out on a Saturday in late June 1886 to walk the Lebanon Pike past Andrew Jackson's sprawling estate just outside Nashville, east in the direction of Knoxville and the Cumberland Mountains.

He traveled, all told, no more than 50 miles from Nashville, but measured by the distance from civilization, Du Bois found himself entering a zone where time had stopped the day after the day of jubilee. He was in a place, he wrote later, that "touched the very shadow of slavery." Wilson County, Tennessee, would remain in his memory bank a lifetime, influencing a prose to which he was beginning to give a mythic spin. Suddenly, a mile or so on the approach to Watertown, then a Cumberland Plateau hamlet of seven homes, Wilson L. Waters' feed store and a brand-new railroad depot, Josie sprang into the road with a sunlit smile and a barrage of questions. Josie (her family name was Dowell) was wiry, dark-skinned, about 20 years old, physically plain, but every inch alive. She and he had never seen the likes of each other before. As they strolled down the road together in mutual fascination, she told him of the schoolhouse over the hill just beyond Alexandria. Presenting himself to the local school commissioner, a pleasant, white college fellow, he was readily appointed teacher to the colored at \$28 a month. Josie's four-room place in a scraggly clearing deep in the woods became home for the summer, with its illiterate, indolent but solid, kindly father, its brood of children and Mrs. Dowell, depicted by Willie as "strong, bustling, and energetic, with a quick, restless tongue, and an ambition to live," she said, just "like folks."

*The Souls of Black Folk* and *The Autobiography* describe a progressive education idyll that summer, but the essay in the *Fisk Herald*, "How I Taught School," is less idyllic and more reminiscent of prim, lovely Charlotte Forten's *Civil War Diary*, a hand-wringing classic by another African-American northerner on a mission of educational uplift in the backward South. By summer's end, teacher Du Bois caught "faint and transient

glimpses of the dawn in the struggling minds of my pupils." Josie, nervous, always in motion, led the class. The *Herald* piece closed with his vowing he "wouldn't take \$200 for [his] summer's experience, and [he] wouldn't experience it again for \$2,000."

But he did. He was back in Alexandria the following summer at \$30 a month, back in this hardscrabble Eden of postbellum innocence, as a lodger again with Josie's people. The experience builds in lyricism now—of white farmers and black laborers in a symbiosis of fatal inefficiency; of transforming modern energies doused and drowned by one-crop economies. There is wasted learning and wasted love, self-hatred, lethargy, decay and miscegenated rape. The struggles of the little people of the South are captured in all their fabulous afflictions. The heroic futility of the two summers weighed upon him. He saw written across the faces deep in Wilson County the rebuked destinies of the black people who came singing, praying and aspiring out of slavery, and who were sinking into "listless indifference, or shiftlessness, or reckless bravado." There is no question but that he grew fond of the people in Wilson County, that they came to have meaning for him, transcending symbolism and sociology. The intensity of his prose when he describes these two summers attests to the personal impact of the Alexandria sojourns.

Ten years passed before Du Bois saw Alexandria again. But ten years later, Josie was dead ("We've had a heap of trouble since you've been away," her mother said), and the 75 acres Doc Burke had finally bought left him deeper in debt. That trade-off of material progress for loss of spirit that humanists are wont to underscore Du Bois saw everywhere, in the flight to Nashville and Knoxville of the young men, in the six-room house the Burkes were building, the store-bought shoes worn by the wives, the new Wheeler schoolhouse with large blackboard and windows. "Death and marriage had stolen youth and left age and childhood there," he reflected. He departed after this third visit wondering how to "measure progress there where the dark face of Josie lies?" Du Bois might have been somewhat consoled could he have known that his teaching would be remembered a century later in Watertown and Alexandria among African-American families, and that some of them—the Dowells and the Burkes in particular—would prosper in real estate and undertaking.

Let us fast-forward to another shaping place—beyond Fisk, Harvard, the Kaiser Friedrich Wilhelm Universität, the Harvard Ph.D., the Atlanta University professorship, the founding of the NAACP, to the second Pan African Congress in summer 1921. The Second Pan African Congress opened in London's Central Hall, resumed in Brussels and adjourned in Paris. In Du Bois, the Pan African idea found an intellectual temperament and organizational audacity enabling it to advance beyond the evangelical and literary to become an embryonic movement of long-term, worldwide significance. No other person of color then living, with the problematic exception of Marcus Garvey, was as capable of articulating the idea and mobilizing others in its service.

The men and women of color attending the three sessions (Du Bois listed about 30 from the United States) came, in large part, because they needed to believe in Du Bois's ecumenical vision. Undoubtedly, some came to London, Brussels and Paris to

boast about their travels when they returned home. But it is very likely that the famous tenor Roland Hayes, the research librarian Ruth Anna Fisher, the young sociologist on fellowship in Denmark E. Franklin Frazier, Morehouse College president John Hope, the spellbinding Chicago prelate Bishop Archibald Carey, Sr., and Mrs. Carey were genuinely engaged in the project. Also attending were Hastings Banda, the East African physician; John L. Dube, the South African educator; and Albert Marryshaw, the Grenadian trade unionist, all of whom were to play similar senior-statesmen roles in their respective countries, as would Ibidiunni Obadende of Nigeria. The evidence is circumstantially strong that a peripatetic young Annamese nationalist named Nguyen That Tan attended the Paris session. He would become much better known as Ho Chih Minh.

"The world must face two eventualities," Du Bois intoned as he reached the conclusion of the principal address, *To the World*. Either Africa must be assimilated completely by Europe on the basis of absolutely equal political, civil and social privileges for its black and white citizens or Europe must allow the rise of an autonomous "great African state" based on popular education, industry and freedom of trade. *Punch* reported the London *Times* headline — "No Eternally Inferior Races" — with the pun "No, but in the opinion of our coloured brothers, some infernally superior ones." Leaving for Brussels, a pleased Du Bois observed that the attention received by the congress "was astonishing."

With its outsized public squares, monumental government palaces and florid architecture, Brussels had served as the unnamed city in *Heart of Darkness* that always reminded Conrad's hero of a "whited sepulchre." As Du Bois and the others had to know, the construction of King Leopold II's new Brussels was financed from the grinding exploitation of the people and minerals of the Congo. Du Bois and his companion, Jessie Fauset, literary editor of *Crisis* magazine, became aware of their well-mannered hosts' mounting unease about a roving symposium on the future of Africa. The Union Congolaise, comprised of pliant Africans, assured the visitors that all was now quite satisfactory in what had not so long before been acknowledged as the nadir of Europe in Africa. Bouncy and articulate, Mfumu Paul Panda, one of the rare educated Congolese, was assigned to guide the delegates on a tour of the cavernous Musée du Congo at Tervuren (today's Musée Royal de l'Afrique Centrale) a few miles outside the capital.

The Museum of the Congo was in a literal and figurative sense a mausoleum for the Congo, its 20 exhibition halls radiating like spokes in a juggernaut from a towering central court. Hall number seven contained masks and sculpture; in others, the wood, agricultural products, minerals, fossils, fauna and flora from Central Africa were displayed in gleaming cases seemingly without end. Du Bois admitted to being simply "astounded." "It was marvelous," he gasped — "the visible, riotous wealth of the Congo . . . the infinite, intriguing, exquisite beauty of art." At his side, Fauset was equally ecstatic over what she saw. Enthusiasm led her to suggest to Panda that American Negroes and Africans would be mutually enriched by a select number of teachers' visiting the Congo, which caused the unnerved educator, according to Fauset,

to recoil in horror, spluttering, "Oh, no, no, no! Belgium would never permit that, the colored Americans are too clever."

The Brussels session of the congress opened in an enormous Beaux Arts structure in the sprawling Parc du Cinquantaire east of the city. Dominated by three triumphal arches, the 90-acre park of tree-lined allées decorated by ornate fountains provided the congress with an ostentatiously European theater in which to contemplate the future of Africa. "We could not have asked for a better setting," wrote Fauset, with no thought of irony.<sup>2</sup> The press tables were crowded. Two generals sat on either side of Blaise Diagne, France's living proof of the summits attainable by assimilated Senegalese. In the audience were several hundred Europeans and dozens of Congolese. His tall frame superbly tailored, the regal, frock-coated Blaise Diagne, High Commissioner of the French Republic and President of the Pan African Congress, conducted the meetings uniquely in French and with imperious disregard for the Americans who found themselves, as Du Bois put it, "linguistically stranded." After three days of what Fauset described as pleasant generalities, "without a word of criticism of colonial governments, without a murmur of complaint of Black Africa," restraint gave way to confrontation.

Du Bois wrote later in *The New Republic* that he had risen "in no spirit of troublemaking" to read the London resolutions on the last afternoon. The relatively mild sentence about Belgian reluctance to allow the Congolese any participation in government, followed by the charge that "her colonial policy is still mainly dominated by the banks and great corporations," stunned the assembly. Resolution VI calling for the restoration of the "ancient common ownership" of African lands plunged the hall into pandemonium. There were cries of "Bolshevist!" and "*absolument inadmissible!*" A Belgian diplomat hurried forward with a resolution that Diagne put to a vote without discussion and declared approved, even though Du Bois complained that "guests and visitors" had voted. In lieu of the demand for education of Africans for "complete self-government," the high commissioner for French West Africa embraced a groveling stipulation that Africans were merely "susceptible of advancement" from their present backwardness and that the Pan African Congress should become part of a federated European uplift movement. August 1921 in Belgium was manifestly the wrong place and time to broach meaningful ideas about colonial progress.

Amenia, New York, serves as our final shaping place. The time is August 1933, the occasion, the so-called second Amenian Conference convened at Troutbeck, the estate of Joel Elias Spingarn, Dutchess County squire, man of letters, publisher and NAACP president. The agenda: to find strategies for coping with the Great Depression. Accommodated four army cots each to ten tents, the attendees began arriving on a rainy, unseasonably cool Friday morning. "All except one were college graduates," Du Bois's summary press report stated. "A number had advanced degrees and three had degrees of doctors of philosophy." Several, such as E. Franklin Frazier, were already

<sup>2</sup> Jessie Fauset, "Impressions of the 2nd Pan-African Congress," *Crisis* (Nov. 1921): 14.

acknowledged social-science paragons. Ralph Bunche, Abram Harris, Charles Hamilton Houston and Ira D. Reid were expected. Bunche, Harris, Brown and Houston, radicals on the Howard University faculty, were attempting to shift the African-American intelligentsia's focus on race to an analysis of the economics of class. The crisis of the decade made economic interpretations among black academics almost as much a seal of professional sophistication as among their white peers, flavoring their parlance with terms such as "social cataclysm," "accumulation and distribution of wealth," the struggle of classes within and between "economic systems" and the like.

In accordance with Du Bois and Spingarn's plan for the four-day event, the participants ranged the grounds of Troutbeck in spirited discussion, aggregated in small, freewheeling discussion groups, and met at scripted intervals for plenary deliberations under a tent large enough for an audience of 75. Amenias objectives were open discussions with optional consideration of any and all questions pertinent to race relations and the national economy. Beyond a summary narrative, therefore, no record was made of the discussions. Distinguished whites from the neighborhood motored over to observe, mingle and, in several instances, to sit in on sessions inconspicuously. Spingarn's friend and neighbor U.S. Treasury Secretary Henry Morgenthau, Jr., visited on the last day of the conference and promptly fell into deep conversation with Du Bois. The camera caught NAACP board member Mary Ovington, standing next to James Weldon Johnson, fedora at the jaunty angle befitting "Gentleman Jim." Ovington was a Progressive relic with white hair accentuated against a smiling dark background. Johnson was increasingly unpopular with some of the young militants who thought him too conservative and schmoozy in the company of powerful whites. A popular libel claimed that Johnson could whisper in a white man's ear so quietly that not even Johnson himself could hear what he was saying.

Saturday morning belonged to the radicals. The Young Turks argued that once economic exploitation was ended through the power of organized labor and state planning, the race problem would fade away. For his part, elder statesman Du Bois looked on indulgently as Harris and Bunche appealed for a broad coalition with labor as part of a plan to bring about a social democratic revolution in the United States. Abram Harris possessed the considerable distinction of having authored a classic at the age of 32—the indispensable *The Black Worker: The Negro and the Labor Movement*. Du Bois's fondness for Harris in no way softened a conviction that the primacy given by Harris and others to class solutions myopically discounted the institutional utility of racism. "Most of the younger trained college group were convinced that the economic pattern of any civilization determined its development along all cultural lines," he sighed. Walter White and Roy Wilkins arrived at the last moment determined to hold the line against far-reaching departures from the association's economic and political programs.

Vigorous objections to the position advanced by Bunche and Harris at the conference materialized before long from a cluster of opinions forming, somewhat surprisingly, around Frazier that attempted to fuse socialism with racial solidarity. Du Bois wrote some time later of having held designs strikingly similar to Frazier's. "I had

hoped for such insistence upon the compelling importance of the economic factor," he remembered, "that this would lead to a project for a planned program for using the racial segregation, which was at present inevitable, in order that the laboring masses might be able to have built beneath them a strong foundation for self-support and social uplift." YWCA staffer Wenonah Bond and Delaware attorney Louis Redding recorded a growing recoil from the economic radicalism of the opening session.

Given Amenia's good weather, sylvan setting, good food, recreational diversions and plenitude of credentials, perhaps it was understandable that the plight of the masses remained an abstraction for some of the conferees. After all, as Bond chirped, "It was a grand crowd—nice people with whom to swim and row and walk and play baseball, and exchange jokes; people who do successful jobs, yet have time to follow hobbies and avocations with enthusiasm." The dominant point of view held that capitalism was down but definitely not out, and that the value of Amenia was to offer pragmatic recommendations to ensure that the best and brightest African-Americans rode out the Depression. Edward Spingarn, who remembered trailing along with his mother as she took moving pictures of the proceedings with an electric camera, believed his father was deeply concerned about the Communist tendencies of the younger intellectuals. "My father felt that this was a tragic mistake," he claimed.

To many, if not the majority, of those who attended, the consensus for change that emerged from Amenia II—despite the incompatibilities and ambiguities—was exciting in its promise of irresistible momentum. According to Du Bois, no one dissented from the criticism that "we had been thinking of the exceptional folk, the Talented Tenth, the well-to-do; that we must now turn our attention toward the welfare and social uplift of the masses." Out of the seeming catharsis of the Sunday-night session, then, came the selection of what Du Bois described as "a continuation committee," temporarily chaired by Houston and composed of Bunche, Frazier, Harris, Reid, Wilkins and Washington economist Mabel Byrd. This was the committee, to be formally established a year later as the Committee on the Future Plan and Program, that the aggressive Harris would attempt to transform into an engine for the reinvention of the NAACP and redefinition of the civil rights struggle. In the end, nevertheless, it was left to the Japanese at Pearl Harbor to resuscitate the national economy and the NAACP.

We end as we began: with Hippolyte Taine's analytical trilogy of race, place and time, because it provides a perfect lead to Du Bois's own *apologia pro vita sua*—of the global place he invented for himself in the 20th century. Summing himself up in *The Autobiography*, William Edward Burghardt said this:

Had it not been for the race problem early thrust upon me and enveloping me, I should have probably been an unquestioning worshipper at the shrine of the established social order into which I was born. But just that part of this order which seemed to most of my fellows nearest perfection seemed to me most inequitable and wrong; and starting from that critique, I gradually, as the years went by, found other things to question in my environment. (155)

# Muddy Waters: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Commemorative Controversy over His Hometown's Symbolic Landscape<sup>\*</sup>

BY CONSTANCE N. BROOKS

In July 2004, a controversy began in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, over the commemoration of native son W. E. B. Du Bois. Debate centered on the name of a newly constructed public elementary school, ultimately called the Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School.

The school-name controversy in Great Barrington spanned several months and was enacted through media coverage, letters to the editor, speeches at School Committee meetings and submissions to the School Committee. The process of naming the school revealed competing views of Great Barrington's past, present and future identities. Far more than a simple, inconsequential decision, the question of whether or not to commemorate Du Bois by naming the school, part of Great Barrington's symbolic landscape, after him, sparked a controversy revolving around issues of public memory, racial politics, patriotism and regional and national identities.

The recent debate resonated with contested commemoration of other leaders of the civil rights movement throughout the United States, though scholarly work on the topic concentrates on the American South (Alderman, "New Memorial," "Street"; Dwyer, "Interpreting"; Leib). The move to exclude Du Bois's name from Great Barrington's landscape was connected to a historical trend in the "white, free" North to ignore the slave past of the region and to erase a black presence from the landscape (Melish).

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<sup>\*</sup> An excerpt from the master's thesis submitted to the University of London, from which the author received an MA in cultural geography.



This exclusion conflicted with an attempt by the community to define itself as racially tolerant. Du Bois's patriotism and political beliefs became key areas of contention, as residents sought to create and contest their regional and national identities, including a negotiation of memories of the Cold War and McCarthyism. Du Bois's political views were problematic for residents trying to maintain an allegiance to a national identity that valued loyalty to the state and mainstream capitalist views. A focus on Du Bois's "exile" to Ghana and his dubious patriotism underscored his status as "alien" and is tied to a racializing of communism evident in previous objections to Du Bois memorials, and to a general historical trend (Noakes; Schrecker; Horne). The question of whose ideals of patriotism and democracy should be part of the landscape became central to the controversy. Some framed Du Bois's defense of civil liberties as the ultimate commitment to American ideals, whereas others framed his actions as a threat to political stability.

Du Bois was portrayed as either an insider—i.e., a product of the local schools and a source of pride—or an outsider, different in race, opposed in politics and a threat to the future. Great Barrington's controversy is instructive of how discourses of power, race, politics and identity are evidenced and contested in a commemorative landscape.

### Great Barrington's Symbolic Landscape

The symbolic landscape of the town is dominated by war and veterans' memorials. Place markers also denote sites of historical interest. The town's only high school is named after Monument Mountain, a prominent geographical feature. William Cullen Bryant Elementary School and Searles Middle School (replaced by Muddy Brook Elementary and Monument Valley Middle schools) were named after prominent white, male citizens of Great Barrington. One unusual plaque recalls a Great Barrington native, Laura Ingersoll Secord. Secord, who moved to Canada after the Revolutionary War, is noted for her loyalty to the British during the War of 1812. Secord's plaque is unique because she is one of the only women memorialized publicly and because she was a traitor to the American cause; therefore, the plaque does not contribute to the dominant patriotic tone of the war memorials. According to one interviewee, the placement of the plaque by the town's historic commission in 1997 did engender some opposition. Another unique memorial, the Newsboy Monument, was erected in 1895 by Colonel William L. Brown, part owner of the *New York Daily News*, to honor the unsung, poorly paid children who sold newspapers on city streets and without whom the paper could not have succeeded. Monuments to children are rare; though unique, the statue celebrates American virtues of hard work and determination.

In general, the symbolic landscape of Great Barrington supports a patriotic national and regional identity in the form of war and veterans' memorials. Historic markers highlight the town's settlement by the English and subsequent removal of Native Americans. Even unusual markers, such as the Secord plaque and the Newsboy Monument, reveal common tropes of American virtues: unsung heroism, dedication, hard work and courage.

## Commemoration of W. E. B. Du Bois

The Du Bois boyhood homesite became the focus of controversy in 1968 and 1969 when a group of local and international supporters sought to preserve the site as a park. It was once home to Du Bois's maternal grandfather, Othello Burghardt, and Du Bois himself lived there for several years as a child. Though friends deeded the site to Du Bois in 1928 as a birthday present, he was never able to rehabilitate the house and it fell into ruin. Walter Wilson, a white southerner and lifelong member of the NAACP, and Edmund Gordon, former national director of Project Head Start, purchased the site in 1967 (Fletcher 33). The pair founded the Du Bois Memorial Foundation in 1968 and soon attracted national sponsors, including Aaron Copeland, Ossie Davis and Sidney Poitier. When word began to circulate in town of the plans to commemorate Du Bois with a park, opposition formed. As Fletcher notes, "Editorial comments in the *Berkshire Courier* (recanted in 1979), neighboring property owners, and members of the American Legion and Veterans of Foreign Wars criticized Du Bois for joining the Communist Party at age ninety-three and alleged, incorrectly, that he had renounced his U.S. citizenship" (34). The controversy was also racially charged. When dedication ceremonies neared, the local police department assembled riot gear in anticipation of violence that might occur on the site between "local ultrapatriots" and "black militant and other groups from metropolitan areas such as Hartford and Albany, N.Y. [who] were planning an incident."<sup>1</sup> The dedication ceremony proved to be peaceful.

In 1976, the site was granted National Historic Landmark status by the National Parks Service. Now in the custody of the University of Massachusetts, it has languished due to a lack of funds and general lack of interest. Though the subject of an archaeological field school for several years, the plot remains neglected and hard to locate. The site's transformation is a good example of Pierre Nora's concept of a *lieu de mémoire's* capacity for change. It moved from family home to neglected site, then became a memorial park and center of controversy, later an archaeological dig investigating the region's African-American history. Plans for the future include turning it into a locus for that history. Illustrating Kenneth Foote and Owen Dwyer's concept of symbolic accretion, the site has gained layers of meaning due to its storied past.

Other efforts to commemorate Du Bois have been more successful and prominent. In 1994, the local historical society marked the site of Du Bois's birthplace and the family burial plot with brass plaques. The W. E. B. Du Bois River Garden, near Du Bois's birthplace, was dedicated in 2002. The river garden, created by a private group, did not attract widespread opposition. A youth group has painted a large mural memorializing Du Bois's life in a prominent downtown location. Finally, reflecting renewed interest in Du Bois's connection to the town and part of a larger trend of African-American heritage tourism, a pamphlet detailing 50 sites related to Du Bois in Great Barrington was recently published (Drew).

<sup>1</sup> "Du Bois Rites Occasioned Strong Security Measures," *Berkshire Eagle* 25 Oct. 1969.

Because the topics under investigation (such as race and politics) can be contentious and difficult to discuss, I felt that a variety of methods would be the best approach. For example, interview respondents were often more candid in person than they were in written correspondence to the local media. In the end, I incorporated archival research, data coding, interviews and participatory observation into my full analysis.

The naming controversy, received substantial media attention. The media coverage at times fed the controversy, and editorials and letters to the editor served as a sounding board for community members. To focus my analysis, I researched a year's worth of coverage, from the time the naming controversy entered the papers through the naming decision and its aftermath. I also surveyed the media coverage of the 1968–1969 boyhood-home dedication to place the recent controversy in context and reviewed the W. E. B. Du Bois Memorial Committee documents. I obtained copies of the applicable School Committee meeting minutes and letters that were submitted to the School Committee, all public documents.

The number of media articles and letters was initially overwhelming. To help sort the emerging themes, I employed a content coding system and constructed a spreadsheet to organize the information. I also applied a similar coding system to the archival material from the 1960s to aid my understanding of that controversy. Though I had some preliminary ideas of themes that might be contained in the media coverage, I allowed them to emerge from the data.

I visited and photographed many of the Du Bois–related sites in Great Barrington, observed a musical presentation titled *Souls Within the Veil* and a history lecture on the origins of the local African-American community, participated in a colloquium held by the African American Biography Curriculum Project and joined a Du Bois–themed tour. Attending these events allowed me to observe what was being said outside of a direct-interview situation, and subsequent reflections deepened my understanding of the controversy.

## Racial Politics and the Symbolic Landscape

In a controversy about the commemoration of an African-American activist in a town with a white majority of 95 percent, the debate inevitably revolved in part around issues of race. In fact, the rhetoric of race and allegations of racism (and consequent denials of it) played a very public role in the naming controversy.

The high level of support for Du Bois's name from white area residents was notable. There was an overall sense that the community wanted to see itself as tolerant and wanted to distance itself from the overt racist rhetoric that characterized the resistance to the Du Bois boyhood-homesite dedication in 1968 and 1969. Many letters written to the local newspapers mentioned time, as in "Now is the right time to support the commemoration of Du Bois." One such example reads:

Instead of censuring, marginalizing or icily ignoring Du Bois, the time has

come for Great Barrington to honor this great man for what he accomplished and for what he inspired others to do.<sup>2</sup>

"Time" was a euphemism for changing racial attitudes.

Several interview respondents commented on their white status. One remarked, "I'm one of the white guys," and tied his involvement to a personal effort to overcome prejudices.<sup>3</sup> Other respondents commented that it fell to some members of the white community to support efforts to commemorate Du Bois because the local black population was small.<sup>4</sup> Several respondents characterized the local black community as timid and hesitant to become involved, perhaps out of a fear of retaliation. One letter writer questioned the racial motives of white support for Du Bois:

How can you name a school after a black man when you don't know us at all? You can find my family—we are the only people of color on our block! Nobody asked us. Naming the school after W. E. B. Du Bois because he was a good man is one thing, naming the school after him because he was black is another. Is the 94.74 percent white population just trying to be liberal and say—see we named our school after a black man, we're not racist?<sup>5</sup>

The writer is troubled by the fact that there were liberal, white supporters for Du Bois in a predominantly white town and impugns their motives. Support for naming the school after Du Bois was not unanimous among the area's minorities. If the support for Du Bois's name only serves to gratify some white folks' need to appear tolerant and progressive, the argument went, then I, a member of the minority, dissent. The letter generated a flurry of responses, including this one:

A 94.74 majority of white people in this town does not mean those white people are racists. I have never met [F. J.], but I can assure you that if we were to meet, I would treat him with the same respect I treat anyone. A respect based on his conduct, not his color. If [F. J.] experiences behavior in exception to that attitude, his letter should have been about that problem, and not about the naming of the school.<sup>6</sup>

The writer of the above letter reacts very personally to the generalized allegation of racism put forth by F. J. The personalization of the debate was an aspect that appeared many times throughout the year in letters, at meetings and in interviews with respon-

<sup>2</sup> K. B. and D. A., "Time for town to honor Du Bois," letter, *Berkshire Eagle* 5 Sept. 2004. See also H. M., "Barrington must honor Du Bois," letter, *Berkshire Eagle* 24 Jan. 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Interview notes, "C."

<sup>4</sup> Interview notes, "C and D."

<sup>5</sup> F. J., "Is Du Bois campaign feel-good liberalism?" *Berkshire Eagle* 8 Nov. 2004.

<sup>6</sup> M. N., "Baseless charge of racism in Barrington," *Berkshire Eagle* 16 Nov. 2004. See also F. T., "Du Bois belongs to all Americans," *Berkshire Eagle* 22 Nov. 2004.

dents. Joanne Melish contends that in New England, a disownment of the region's slave past led to a discomfort with the presence of African-Americans in the landscape. She argues, "It was an easy leap from the erasure of the experience of slavery to the illusion of the historical absence of people of color generally" (xiv). She quotes several African-Americans who experienced life in both the South and the North, including onetime Great Barrington resident James Weldon Johnson, who writes, "'Northern white people love the Negro in a sort of abstract way, as a race; through a sense of justice, charity, and philanthropy'" (qtd. in Melish xii). Based on these and like observations, Melish suggests there existed a "visceral discomfort on the part of northern whites with the actual, physical presence of individual persons of color in the landscape" (xiii). Some element of this resistance is still evident in New England, and in Great Barrington particularly, and was part of the resistance to placing Du Bois's name prominently in the community.

In the recent school-naming debate, there was no direct support for the contention that some residents did not want their landscape marked with a black person's name, though anecdotally it existed. Several interview respondents mentioned their belief that town-government representatives were opposed to the idea and directed the School Committee not to choose Du Bois's name.<sup>7</sup> The overwhelming support of geographical features as appropriate names for the two schools may have been an indirect indication, as are the letters that stated that naming the school after any person would be inappropriate. One notable letter submitted from the Stockbridge town selectmen (constituent town of the school district) states, "We do not feel that the schools should be named after any person, living or dead. With this in mind we respectfully suggest the following: Monument Mountain Elementary School/Middle School or Berkshire Hills Elementary School/Middle School."<sup>8</sup> The town selectmen of West Stockbridge also submitted a letter to the School Committee. They were more forthcoming, stating, "Regrettably, a small group seeks to appropriate our new buildings via a misplaced, albeit noble, cause. . . . [T]he Board voted to offer our suggestion for naming the new middle and elementary schools: Monument Mountain Elementary School and Monument Mountain Middle School. Please consider our suggestion. Most times, the right choice is the obvious one."<sup>9</sup> As elected officials, quoted town selectmen and School Committee members reflected a dominant hegemony. Melish recommends the use of town and selectmen's records, as they provide "unparalleled insight into the nature and workings

<sup>7</sup> Interview notes, "C and E."

<sup>8</sup> Selectmen, Town of Stockbridge, letter to School Committee, number 161, 29 Nov. 2004.

Note: Although throughout this document letter writers and speakers are listed by their initials in an effort to protect their privacy, letters from town-government representatives are not anonymized. As the selectmen were writing in their capacity as public officials, there is no obligation to protect their privacy. Also, although the term "selectmen" is unnecessarily gender-specific, the town representatives, both men and women, identify themselves with this term; therefore, it is used here.

<sup>9</sup> Selectmen, Town of West Stockbridge, letter to School Committee, number 60, 17 Nov. 2004.

of government at the point of its actual interface with ordinary citizens. . . . [W]hat locally elected officials actually did in the course of interacting with citizens . . . yields a very different understanding of the practices of 'race,' class, and gender" (9). As many people know, there has been a move under way to explore the historic role of people of African descent in Berkshire County, but these efforts have been in contestation with a dominant and historical narrative of their absence.

Racial politics were central to the naming controversy in Great Barrington. Allegations of racism had the unfortunate effect of polarizing the School Committee and supporters of Du Bois's name, making agreement or even compromise hard to attain. White support of Du Bois's name could be attributed to a changing political climate (commemoration of blacks is more accepted now than in the 1960s), attempts to overcome personal prejudices and an overall desire of the community to see itself as liberal and racially tolerant. Support for Du Bois's name, however, conflicted with a dominant and historical narrative that excludes African-Americans from the symbolic landscape of New England. This exclusion has roots in the elimination of slavery from the Northeast and a corollary removal of blacks from the landscape, both physically and symbolically. Several efforts to commemorate Du Bois in Great Barrington have been successful (the mural and the birthplace plaque, for example), which shows that change has taken place, albeit slowly. In the case of the school, however, support for geographical place-names and the restriction against naming the school after any person were methods used, knowingly or not, to ensure that the dominant commemorative traditions were maintained.

### **Patriotism and Politics: Toward Creating a Shared Identity**

Du Bois's move to Ghana, his political move away from the center (to the left) and his dubious patriotism became key areas of contention in the naming controversy, emphasizing his status as alien and "other."

A dichotomy between inside and outside was often found in letters regarding Du Bois's choice to leave the United States and move to Ghana. As in the following letter, Du Bois was often portrayed as an outsider and expatriate:

Du Bois turned against this country, loudly and publicly denouncing it and opting to move to Ghana in a state of self-imposed exile. . . . Much thought must be given to the name selected for this complex. It is the least our School Committee members can do for those of us who own homes here. . . . More importantly, they owe it to those who have died in the defense and pursuit of freedom.<sup>10</sup>

This letter writer focuses on Du Bois's move to Ghana, questioning his allegiance to the United States. To "turn against" implies an aggressive stance and active abandonment.

<sup>10</sup> L. R., "Du Bois not worthy of honoring," letter, *Berkshire Eagle* 5 July 2004.

Du Bois was also contrasted with those current residents of the three towns that make up the school district who were “here” and would be asked to pay for the school and its signage. Du Bois’s exile was “self-imposed” in contrast to those who must leave the country because of their jobs or because of “duty to country.” The writer of the above letter recognizes that not all those who die on foreign soil are tainted with un-Americanism. Journalist Daniel Pearl and a local serviceman who died in Iraq were cited as far more deserving of the honor than Du Bois.<sup>11</sup> Du Bois’s action, because chosen willingly and seemingly tied to his decision to become a Communist, incited outrage. To die for your country engaged in the battle to bring “freedom” to another country was viewed as noble; in contrast, Du Bois’s decision was ignoble and undeserving of honor. Heroes are often tied to a patriotic narrative of the past—think of war memorials such as Pearl Harbor, the Alamo, Boston’s Freedom Trail. In this light, Du Bois’s actions could not be considered heroic or worthy of veneration.

The above letter generated several further letters in response. One person contends:

This country is guilty of not living up to its Constitution when it comes to equality for all. For over 90 years Du Bois was forced to live with this injustice. He worked tirelessly for the cause of justice and equality.<sup>12</sup>

In this case, those seen as not supporting the Constitution are the ones portrayed as un-American. Du Bois, in comparison, is likened to the Founding Fathers, the authors of the Constitution, allied in thought to Du Bois by their belief in justice and equality. By referring to “this country” the letter writer chooses not to locate the debate in Great Barrington as so many others did, and broadens the debate to more general discourses regarding equality and justice in the U.S. The “cause of justice and equality” is equated with the Constitution, a symbol of the freedoms for which Americans are supposed to stand. The letter writer positions Du Bois, a supporter of these American goals, as more of a patriot than those in opposition to him and his commemoration.

Such exchanges revealed a dispute regarding whose ideas of patriotism and democracy should be remembered in the landscape of Great Barrington. Nuala Johnson notes, “The vocabulary of patriotism is particularly important ‘because it has the capacity to mediate both vernacular loyalties to local and familiar places and official loyalties to national and imagined structures’” (7). A conflict between an overarching patriotism to the nation and loyalties to local and familiar places and people was evident in the controversy. Patriotism to the nation was important for residents and aided in maintaining their identity as Americans. For some, Du Bois’s disloyalty to the nation was an

<sup>11</sup> L. R., “Du Bois not worthy of honoring,” letter, *Berkshire Eagle* 5 July 2004. See also W. W., letter to School Committee, not numbered, 19 Dec. 2004, and D. H., letter to School Committee, number 53, 19 Nov. 2004.

<sup>12</sup> E. D., “Name one new school after W. E. B. Du Bois,” letter, *Berkshire Eagle* 21 July 2004. See also H. S., “Honoring Du Bois would honor town also,” letter, *Berkshire Eagle* 9 July 2004; K. B. and D. A., “Honor scholar and rights pioneer,” letter, *Berkshire Eagle* 14 July 2004; and S. H., “Real explanation for Du Bois debate,” letter, *Berkshire Eagle* 24 July 2004.



overriding concern. As a *site of memory* (Nora), the school and its signage helps construct the community's identity. One choice—to name the school after Du Bois—would frame the community as liberal and tolerant in the North, where commemoration of civil rights leaders is unusual (see Alderman's ["Street"] analysis of streets named after Martin Luther King, Jr., which are concentrated in the South). To oppose and exclude Du Bois's name would be a choice aligned with a historical trend in New England and with a more conventional national identity that honors veterans and white males to the exclusion of others. Regardless of the outcome, the process itself held value. Forest et al. note, "Critical discussion about the multiple meanings of the forms, functions and locations of public places of memory, as well as the pasts to be remembered, may be a process through which past injustices can be confronted to work through cultural trauma (LaCapra 1994), and to imagine different futures" (360).

However, loyalty to the local area was also celebrated, and consequently many writers focused on Du Bois's loyalty to Great Barrington. In contrast to letters that sought to portray Du Bois as subversive, others positioned him as a native and as one who loved his hometown. Portraying Du Bois as an insider, one writer maintains:

His fond feeling for the town where he was born and grew up, testifies to the way he must have been treated here at a time when race relations in other places were far from just or kind. It would honor the man and the town.<sup>13</sup>

This quotation demonstrates that writers tied Du Bois's fondness for his hometown to tolerant racial attitudes of Great Barrington. It is part of a process to reveal the town as a racially benign place. Another writer declares:

Great Barrington is the heart of Du Bois' life. His family heritage is here through his beloved mother and their family homestead. Du Bois sent his wife, Nina, back to the welcoming shelter of Great Barrington to bear both their children. Nina and their cherished son, Burghardt, are both buried in the Mahaiwe cemetery. Du Bois wrote lovingly of the surrounding landscape and the stretch of the Housatonic which graces Great Barrington. In Du Bois' writing some of his gentlest and most poetic words were inspired by memories of his life here.<sup>14</sup>

Rather than focusing on Du Bois's renowned achievements, this writer focuses on his roots in Great Barrington and his love for and loyalty to it. His comfort with the town was revealed by his decision to send his wife there to deliver her children.

The struggle to commemorate a man who was loyal to the town conflicted with an "official" patriotism of the townspeople to the nation. One letter writer cites Du Bois's

<sup>13</sup> S. H., "An honor for Du Bois and his hometown," *Berkshire Eagle* 5 July 2004. See also B. B., "Good idea to name school after Du Bois," *Berkshire Eagle* 5 July 2004.

<sup>14</sup> A. H., "Do the right thing by Du Bois," *Berkshire Eagle* 29 July 2004. See also E. G., "Barrington's chance to right a wrong," *Berkshire Eagle* 15 July 2005; R. W., "Deface or embrace?" *Berkshire Eagle* 5 Aug. 2004.

loyalty as reason enough to commemorate him: "Citizen of Great Barrington, U.S.A.' According to [H. M.], these were the words W. E. B. Du Bois authorized to be put on a huge banner for his memorial service in Ghana. . . . Wow! How's that for devotion?"<sup>15</sup> The writer makes the point that Du Bois remembered Great Barrington even in death; yet since his death, Great Barrington has forgotten him. Du Bois's fondness for the town of his birth was rarely cited as sufficient cause to commemorate him, but it was an added reason, given his other achievements. In contrast, a submission to the School Committee remarks that Du Bois is not the only one who loved his hometown, and argues, "I would recommend . . . the middle school be named after an area military person whom died in action. Along with other reasons, [B. D.] supports Dr. Du Bois because he 'loved his hometown.' There are several local men and women whom have paid the ultimate sacrifice and loved both their hometown and their country."<sup>16</sup> Sites of memory become focal points for divergent allegiances. Sites often spark many voices of support and contestation; in this case, what and who were labeled democratic and patriotic were subject to much discussion.

Several writers focused on Du Bois's exile and questionable patriotism to emphasize his status as an alien and "other." Others stressed his status as an insider and one whose love for and loyalty to Great Barrington never flagged. How does a town commemorate a man who became disloyal to his country but remained steadfast to his hometown? The question of whose ideas of patriotism and democracy would be marked on the landscape was central. One person's idea of a traitor was another's defender of freedom. A national identity was being constructed during the school-naming process, one that referred back to the creation of an American identity but was also seeking to redefine it.

### The Specter of Communism

One person's traitor is another's defender of freedom and rights. Most writers in support of Du Bois mentioned his obvious achievements. A smaller number chose to focus on the controversial elements of his life to show that even considering those, Du Bois's overarching politics were patriotic. Quite often the debate revolved around his decision to join the Communist Party in 1961. For some, to espouse anything other than democratic and capitalistic ideals was tantamount to treason. For others, freely thinking and acting on your beliefs represented the height of democracy, especially if it was in the face of pressure from the state to do otherwise. Du Bois's politics were framed in opposing ways. Objections to his Communist politics were tied to a racializing of communism and a politicizing of civil rights that circulated in the mid-20th century and was evident in the recent debate.

One writer cites a passage from Du Bois's autobiography in which he fondly recalled attending town meetings in Great Barrington as a youth:

<sup>15</sup> F. L., "Return loyalty shown by Du Bois," letter, *Berkshire Eagle* 26 Apr. 2005.

<sup>16</sup> W. W., letter to School Committee, not numbered, 19 Dec. 2004.

"Gradually as I grew up, I began to see that this was the essence of democracy: listening to the other man's opinion and then voting your own, honestly and intelligently."<sup>17</sup>

The writer portrays Du Bois as a proponent of a symbol of the very essence of American democracy. This reference to the openness and democratic ideal of the town meeting had particular resonance in the context of the School Committee's process of naming the schools, where members of the public were not necessarily free to speak and where the decision was made by the ten School Committee representatives, not by a vote of constituents. The letter writer emphasizes that Du Bois learned about and appreciated the democratic ideal when he lived in Great Barrington. His future views are not a concern, as long as Great Barrington once nurtured a love of democracy in Du Bois.

Another writer, taking in the totality of Du Bois's life, commends his accomplishments, which include the pursuit of "equality and freedom":

It will do honor to our school district and to our county if one of the schools carries the name of this great American [W. E. B. Du Bois] who accomplished so much in the name of equality and freedom.<sup>18</sup>

However, for many residents, Du Bois's allegiance to communism provided the sole basis for their objection to his commemoration. Whether this was an echo of the objections to the boyhood-homesite dedication in the late 1960s or a slowly dying remnant of McCarthyism in general, the strength of the objection was no less powerful in contemporary times. Regardless of the historical cause, privileging communism in any way was not an identity that members of this community wished to embrace. The objection to communism was a near-universal feature of the news coverage of the naming debate, such as in the following article:

In the debate among adults in the community, some residents and school officials have questioned the propriety of naming the schools for DuBois. Near the end of his 95 years, DuBois joined the American Communist Party, a move that continues to generate controversy in South County to this day.<sup>19</sup>

In another article, he is noted only as the "former Lenin Peace Prize winner,"<sup>20</sup> emphasizing his Communist ties above his other accomplishments. A letter writer laments, "How soon we forget Dubois died a Communist and was not even a citizen of the United States at the time."<sup>21</sup> Forest et al. note, "For societies undergoing political transition, place-making and memory processes are significant spatial practices through

<sup>17</sup> Du Bois qtd. in D. L., "Memorialize DuBois' contributions," letter, *Berkshire Record* 18 Feb. 2005.

<sup>18</sup> R. V., letter to the Superintendent of Schools, number 55, 2 Nov. 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Kelley, E., "Suggested names for 2 new schools keep on growing," *Berkshire Record* 22 Dec. 2004.

<sup>20</sup> Tolman, M., "Selection of names for two new schools sparks controversy," *Berkshire Record* 21 Jan. 2005.

<sup>21</sup> C. R., "Plenty of DuBois reminders," *Berkshire Record* 18 Mar. 2005.

which the national past is reconstructed and through which political and social change may be negotiated" (358). Political tension, if not transition, existed in Berkshire County. The censure of Du Bois's political beliefs resonated with some individuals opposed to President George W. Bush's policies. Several interviewees identified themselves as political liberals and likened their anti-Bush stance to Du Bois's dissenting political beliefs and consequent harassment.<sup>22</sup> Likewise, for a generation that remembers the Cold War and was subject to its propaganda, the recent debate served as a place of negotiation for memories.

Objections to Du Bois's Communist stance may not have seemed to be about race, but examined more closely, they revealed a racial undertone. Noakes points out that historically, anticommunist projects were often tied to efforts to subdue civil rights progress. He states, "In its interpretation of how racial dynamics were portrayed in movies, the FBI associated whiteness with Americanism and blackness with subversion" (732). Blacks "were understood as having only a fragile commitment to American values and traditions and therefore as vulnerable to the seductive, if false promises of radicals" including, of course, Communists (730). Ellen Schrecker discusses many of the tropes that were employed during the Cold War by the government. "Communism, the FBI and many Americans assumed, automatically endowed someone with a propensity for destruction," she notes (1054). Schrecker ties the fear-mongering of the McCarthy era to several "racial projects," not least an opposition to the civil rights movement. She states, "Because the Communist party had been strongly committed to racial equality, many loyalty investigators believed that party members could be identified by their support for civil rights and participation in interracial activities" (1067).

Compared with the media coverage of the boyhood-home dedication in the late 1960s, there has been a softening view toward communism. However, objections to Du Bois's Communist politics contained a racial undertone, tied to a racializing of communism and a politicizing of civil rights that occurred in the mid-20th century and still circulates today.

### **Voting for Muddy Waters**

In January 2005, in a vote that was pointedly not unanimous (6–4), the Berkshire Hills Regional School Committee chose to name one of two newly constructed buildings the Muddy Brook Regional Elementary School. This act culminated months of vociferous debate among community members over the contested commemoration of W. E. B. Du Bois. Far more than a simple, inconsequential decision, the question of whether or not to commemorate Du Bois by naming the school, part of Great Barrington's symbolic landscape, after him, sparked a controversy revolving around issues of public memory, racial politics, patriotism, regional and national identities and education of children. Momentum for Du Bois commemoration had built, and in May 2005, Great Barrington residents voted by a factor of two to one to erect signs on major auto routes declaring

<sup>22</sup> Interview notes, "D and F."

Great Barrington the hometown of Du Bois. Of course, Great Barrington's process of commemorating Du Bois is hardly "concluded." As Dwyer's theory of symbolic accretion shows, Du Bois-related commemorative sites will continue to undergo transformation and gain new meanings in years to come.

Drawing on Jonathan Leib's notion of "symbolic landscape," my analysis focused on one aspect of Great Barrington's symbolic landscape, the public school name. I argued that the school's name could be read as a "memorial text" (Dwyer *Symbolic*), shaped by the community, but also imbued with power to frame the future identity of the town (Cosgrove; Cosgrove and Daniels). The naming controversy highlighted competing views of the town's symbolic landscape, and how multiple social groups attempted to negotiate that shared symbolic space (Till; Hayden).

Drawing on Melish, I argue that objections to Du Bois's commemoration in Great Barrington resonated with a historical trend of excluding blacks from the landscape of "white, free" New England. This exclusion was confirmed by a dominant place-name hegemony consisting of geographical place names and buildings named after dead white males. This hegemony conflicted with a desire to portray the community as liberal and racially tolerant. Some residents felt proud that a great thinker, educator and promoter of civil rights was nurtured in this place. Others wanted to disown Du Bois's connection to the town and distance themselves from a racial and political "other." The issue of race became a polarizing force, placing local government officials on the defensive in the face of allegations of racism made by members of the public.

Race, politics, identity and patriotism blurred in Great Barrington's controversy. Objections to Du Bois's politics reflected a national, historic racializing of communism (Noakes; Schrecker; Horne). This trend reemerged in the contemporary debate and combined with an unfavorable evaluation of Du Bois's patriotism. Proponents of Du Bois's name for the school tied their support to his defense of civil liberties in the face of harassment, while others described his actions as unpatriotic, verging on treasonous. The naming controversy provided an opportunity for negotiation of memories of the Cold War and McCarthyism, part of an overall exploration of the town's current identity. The school name became an example of Nora's *lieux de mémoire*, for a national identity was being constructed, one that referred back to the creation of an American identity but was also seeking to redefine it.

The school-naming controversy and contested commemoration of Du Bois was an example of negotiation over a landscape's symbolic value. The controversy highlighted the exclusion of blacks from New England's symbolic landscape, the power of memorials and landscape to articulate regional and national identities. Most striking, the naming controversy in Great Barrington is a contemporary example of Melish's theories of the historic exclusion of blacks in the physical and symbolic New England landscape. The town's attempts to commemorate its past culminated in a social process contesting contemporary identities. Ultimately, it will affect the future of the town—as the children who participated in the debate eventually reflect, debate and decide on their own version of the past and vision of the future.

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# Transforming Space into Time: Narratives of Place in *The Souls of Black Folk*

BY DAVID J. LANGSTON

One of the more poignant and deeply felt personal episodes in *The Souls of Black Folk* is based on two summers during college that W. E. B. Du Bois spent teaching school in the backwoods of Tennessee. Du Bois's autobiographical account of the close personal bonds he formed among a community of poor farmers confers notable importance on the rural locale in which they all dwell together. With his descriptions, Du Bois renders the place as a charmed circle where discord and the clash of modern armies of the night are only distant thunder. Conversely, he also makes his readers keenly aware throughout this chapter—whose title is “Of the Meaning of Progress”—that the residents consider their own lives to be incomplete. They hunger for education not readily available, they must migrate to the city to earn the cash necessary to sustain their rural farms and their poverty makes farming vulnerable to both natural and social contingencies of weather and commodity prices.

These disparate and incongruent attitudes that Du Bois displays toward rural Tennessee belong to a comprehensive strategy for referring to place in *The Souls of Black Folk*: While he repeatedly uses place as a complex emblem for a mosaic of cultural and economic issues, he nonetheless resists hypostasizing a location or even its place name as representing ahistorical or transcendent norms that remain invulnerable to critique or improvement. Instead, he explores the contradictions and negations in the *story* of places such as Atlanta, the Black Belt or even his hometown, Great Barrington, Massachusetts, to point toward the transformations that are indispensable for a just social order.

Du Bois's inclination to elevate specific places as emblems of value has attracted the notice of his readers, but their prevailing interpretation is to see him making landscapes, buildings or regions into embodiments of the spirit of the black community. As James Kerkerer has recently summarized this argument, Du Bois "associat[es] the *genius loci* not with the nation but with the race" (*Poetics* 106). Kerkerer's term *genius loci* links Du Bois to a tradition that reaches back to classical times for making place into a symbol of animating spirit. In the modern era, Neoclassical and Romantic poets invoke this older, more multifaceted Roman notion, "spirit of place," to celebrate the totality of values and traits that could be summarized by using the name of a particular locale. By the middle of the 19th century, well before Du Bois was born, *genius loci* had been expanded into a commonplace for communicating the characteristics of a sociocultural formation or the principles of an abstract idea: Invoking the name of a place meant invoking the totality of traits associated with that place.

Those readers who claim that Du Bois resorts to this habit of thought in *The Souls of Black Folk* are susceptible to several troubling and oversimplifying interpretations of his text. Perhaps most significantly, by giving emphasis to the role of place, Du Bois's critics are led into downplaying the historical framework that conditions all of his thinking, and it can even lead them to some odd evaluations of his analysis—a point to which I will turn in due course.

One conclusion toward which this essay presses is uncomplicated: References to place in *The Souls of Black Folk* cannot be explained with a single rubric. But the results from that proposition lead us toward a more layered, complex reading of the book. I contend that Du Bois assigns several different and distinct functions to place, three of which are prominent in *Souls*: first, a conventional use of *genius loci* as a static symbol of realized values; second, a Romantic appeal to place as the embodiment of a "world elsewhere"; and, third, place as an organizing figure for Du Bois's historical analysis that lays great stress on incompleteness and an open future yet to be realized.

## I

Reviewing the role of place in *The Souls of Black Folk* should properly begin by recognizing that Du Bois does indeed use the conventions of *genius loci* at points in his text. As the scholarship of Houston Baker, John Kerkerer and Robert Stepto has demonstrated, Du Bois follows the widespread practice that modernizes and psychologizes the classical trope by using places as contemporary embodiments of historically embedded values. And while I think this method of reading occasionally leads these scholars to overlook important distinctions in Du Bois's use of place as a representational code, it remains true that he avails himself of the standard system. One commonly cited example of the *genius loci* in *Souls* is Du Bois's reference to Fisk's Jubilee Hall in the opening paragraph of the "Sorrow Songs" chapter.

Ever since I was a child these songs have stirred me strangely. They came out of the South unknown to me, one by one, and yet at once I knew them as of

me and of mine. Then in after years when I came to Nashville I saw the great temple builded of these songs towering over the pale city. To me Jubilee Hall seemed ever made of the songs themselves, and its bricks were red with the blood and dust of toil. Out of them rose for me morning, noon, and night, bursts of wonderful melody, full of the voices of my brothers and sisters, full of the voices of the past. (155)

This college structure endures as the synchronic monument, a "temple," to the totality of his response to songs that Du Bois has encountered as a diachronic series ("one by one"). Its durable presence unifies a cluster of virtues that might otherwise be dispersed, isolated and even lost in both time and space. If the building's physical appearance represents toil and suffering, its melodies represent the spirit's capacity to transcend and to transform that brutal past, celebrating the present while maintaining a link to the past. In anticipation of the argument I will pursue below regarding the historical contextualizing of place to give it an open future, it is important to note here that Jubilee Hall remains as a vehicle for delivering past achievements to ensuing generations. In this instance, place supplies both a formal illustration of those achievements and a shorthand term for invoking their example. And that emphasis on place as index for perpetuating past achievement is, I think, the best one-phrase definition for place rendered in the rhetoric of *genius loci*.

## II

Du Bois makes infrequent use of place as a symbol for romanticized world outside historical time; but in describing his stint at summertime teaching in the Tennessee hills, he adopts a set of complementary strategies to communicate his sense of this realm, backwoods Tennessee, as a "charmed circle." For one, he begins the chapter with the time-honored formula for the suspension of disbelief: "Once upon a time I taught school in the hills of Tennessee. . . ." The phrase "once upon a time" signals a calculated move away from the sharp critique of Booker T. Washington that consumes the prior chapter, and it suggests that the narrative to follow occupies a place outside ordinary time in some fictional neverland beyond the reach of pedestrian cause and effect. To be sure, there is an ironic dimension to the phrase whereby Du Bois calls attention to the callow self-importance of a college freshman setting off to enlighten the primitive backwoods. And that same intermixing of mock-heroic and appreciative tones marks the subsequent description of his foray into rural Tennessee.

I was a Fisk student then, and all Fisk men thought that Tennessee—beyond the Veil—was theirs alone, and in vacation time they sallied forth in lusty bands to meet the county school-commissioners. Young and happy, I too went, and I shall not soon forget that summer, seventeen years ago. (46)

The college-age Du Bois shares a common expectation held by a privileged cadre, "Fisk men," that they are licensed to enter a special reserve, another realm insulated

from the schedules and tedium of modern life or academic routine. It is a region so remote—"shut out from the world by the forests and the rolling hills toward the east"—that it lies "beyond railways, beyond stage lines." However, this world is less Edenic than it is "Oriental" in Edward Said's analysis of that term to signify exotic, dangerous otherness: The Fisk men enter a territory with hidden hazards and enigmatic people, a "land of 'varmints' and rattlesnakes, where the coming of a stranger was an event, and men lived and died in the shadow of one blue hill" (Du Bois 46).

To reach this exotic locale beyond the reach of modern modes of travel requires Du Bois, first, to undergo an ordeal and, second, to receive aid from a donor figure—two of the major elements that Vladimir Propp identified 50 years ago as essential to a folk tale (47–52). The ordeal occurs when, unable to afford a horse, he must plod deeper into the mountains because all the teaching posts near Nashville have been taken. The assistance from the traditional "donor," a person he calls Josie, occurs when she alerts him to the potential for a school in the next valley. Her advice propels him across yet one more boundary—a high hill from whose peak he can glimpse other worlds in other valleys in "the blue and yellow mountains stretching toward the Carolinas"—that removes him further from cosmopolitan Nashville, followed by a "plunge" into the woods and an eventual arrival at the farmer's cabin where Josie lives. And threaded through the remainder of the chapter is the same ironically rendered language of romanticized otherness that was a staple of local color and regional fiction in fin-de-siècle America: A village "cuddles" next to its hill, the valley is "shut out from the world by the forests," his pupils "patter" to his school rather than trudge, the bedbugs wander in "herds," the water "jingles" while the sun "laughs," "great chinks" between the logs of the school serve as "windows." In every case, Du Bois constructs himself as the privileged outside observer—a tourist of sorts—peeping into a world of diminutive otherness whose details are all integral to an overall charmed totality.

But once Du Bois turns to describing the inhabitants of this land, he sidesteps momentarily the two-dimensional primitivist stereotypes that regularly appear in the rhetoric of the charmed circle and instead describes each person's unique traits that individuate them.

There remained two growing girls; a shy midget of eight; John, tall, awkward, and eighteen; Jim, younger, quicker, and better looking; and two babies of indefinite age. Then there was Josie herself. She seemed to be the centre of the family: always busy at service, or at home, or berry-picking; a little nervous and inclined to scold, like her mother, yet faithful, too, like her father. She had about her a certain fineness, the shadow of an unconscious moral heroism that would willingly give all of life to make life broader, deeper, and fuller for her and hers. (47)

By directing the reader's attention to a shared desire for a broader and deeper life, Du Bois retains a historical frame for describing the occupants even while he has

characterized their dwelling place as beyond the reach of historical progress. To be sure, there is an early hint of primitivism when Du Bois says that Josie's aspirations remain "unconscious," but in the context of the overall argument of *Souls*, it is fair to say that Du Bois thinks that a program of education, the franchise and social inclusion will bring those unconscious strivings to self-conscious articulation. (One can also discern the outline of Du Bois's residual Hegelian habits of thought in this characterization of unconscious aspiration: The social underclass—analogue to Hegel's "antithesis"—will reach self-consciousness by formalizing forces already at work, unconsciously, in the minds and social behavior of the underclass.)

When he turns to schooling, Du Bois implements a program of study that plays out this tension between place and narrative: The stories the students hear focus on the "world beyond the hill" (48). As a place, the charmed circle of "the hill" may, like Brigadoon, exist outside history's March of Progress, but its inhabitants are subject to the rigors of inequality and economic exploitation that are part of the nation's larger story. Further, the charming quaintness that Du Bois attaches to this rural retreat is transformed into a simple harsh reality when the spirit of another place—New England—is juxtaposed with the world of Tennessee. In describing the corn shed that once acted as the schoolhouse, Du Bois also remembers his sharp awareness of a contrast between two places:

My desk was made of three boards, reinforced at critical points, and my chair, borrowed from the landlady, had to be returned every night. Seats for the children—these puzzled me much. I was haunted by a New England vision of neat little desks and chairs, but, alas! the reality was rough plank benches without backs, and at times without legs. They had the one virtue of making naps dangerous,—possibly fatal, for the floor was not to be trusted. (48)

One place, New England, symbolizes qualities that become a *de facto* standard of judgment external to the Tennessee hills, and the contrast in places highlights the defects that make the lives of his students precarious. It is important to observe here that Du Bois's memoir is caught up in a nostalgic reverie for this absent world only up to the point when the spirit of an alternative place jolts him into a recognition of the limits of his lost world.

The yen for a lost rural homeland that is so prominent in late-19th-century American local-color writing becomes more prominent in the chapter's closing paragraphs as Du Bois recounts a visit he made to the valley ten years later while attending a reunion at Fisk University. The outsider from the city, Du Bois goes back to the country to become a witness to a world in decline. His nostalgia for the lost spirit—"I paused to scent the breeze as I entered the valley"—that once animated this countryside informs these descriptions. Josie is dead, her brother is imprisoned and her family has scattered. Unwed mothers populate the landscape and coarse newcomers preoccupied with conspicuous displays of their new wealth have replaced the sturdy, abstemious yeoman farmers of yesterday. Those few among Du Bois's former associates who prospered have done so

by migrating to another place. While the people have disappeared or been damaged by racial exclusion, the place remains to remind him of a valued but vanishing social formation for which the cosmopolitan observer grieves.

The thematic center of this elegiac reflection on place is dramatized when Du Bois visits the site of his old school: "My log schoolhouse was gone. In its place stood Progress; and Progress, I understand, is necessarily ugly." The newly minted school, made of "jaunty" boards and graced now by three windows and a door that locks, now "perches" on its foundation. The benches inside still have no backs, but the blackboard is bigger and the county now owns the property. But even with all the modern advantages to which Du Bois, the cosmopolite, is committed, the forces of an impersonal Progress have dislodged an old spirit of place to which he finds himself, somewhat paradoxically, attached: "As I sat by the spring and looked on the Old and the New I felt glad, very glad, and yet—" The ellipsis that concludes that sentence reveals the profound ambivalence that marks the consideration of place at the close of this episode of *Souls* (52).

Embracing this nostalgic attitude of the local colorist without irony or equivocation, Du Bois enlarges on the early hints of primitivism and turns to celebrate the ahistorical morality of the hill's longtime occupants:

So I hurried on, thinking of the Burkes. They used to have a certain magnificent barbarism about them that I liked. They were never vulgar, never immoral, but rather rough and primitive, with an unconventionality that spent itself in loud guffaws, slaps on the back, and naps in the corner. . . . Then I came to the Burkes' gate and peered through; the enclosure looked rough and untrimmed, and yet there were the same fences around the old farm save to the left, where lay twenty-five other acres. And lo! the cabin in the hollow had climbed the hill and swollen to a half-finished six-room cottage. (53)

Even the "primitive" Burkes have improved their material condition by expanding from cabin to cottage, but these primitive paragons have also been subject to historical forces that have led to division and decline in the family.

Du Bois concludes the chapter by turning away from considering place to meditate on the mutability of time and the mockery of a historical Progress that promises steady improvement but leaves so many people dead in its wake.

My journey was done, and behind me lay hill and dale, and Life and Death. How shall man measure Progress there where the dark-faced Josie lies? How many heartfuls of sorrow shall balance a bushel of wheat? How hard a thing is life to the lowly, and yet how human and real! And all this life and love and strife and failure,—is it the twilight of nightfall or the flush of some faint-dawning day?

Thus sadly musing, I rode to Nashville in the Jim Crow car. (53)

Grieving after witnessing firsthand the loss of emblematic power in this special place, Du Bois leaves it behind and has reentered historical time, traveling, he reminds us, in the Jim Crow car, a badge of the degradation of that historical moment. Like the local-color writers, he also muses with vague apprehension over the futility of Time that has demonstrated its potential for overwhelming and transforming beyond recognition the charm of a place that he continues, even as he leaves, to hold sacred and invest with the wistful yearning for a Space that could exist outside the harsh demands of living in Time.

### III

The third role Du Bois assigns to place in *The Souls of Black Folk* consists in serving as organizing figure for complex historical transformations that have both a storied past and a qualitatively different future. In this third use of place, locations symbolize neither a permanent benchmark of excellence nor a cozy retreat from the harsh rigors of historical burdens; rather, in this third use, place is positioned as a perpetually moving threshold between past values and future values, and the story of that conversion is central to the importance of place metaphors as a tool for thinking.

Du Bois signals this more complex and contingent attitude toward place with his introduction of the city in the opening line of the chapter "Of the Wings of Atalanta":

South of the North, yet north of the South, lies the City of a Hundred Hills, peering out from the shadows of the past into the promise of the future. (54)

Occupying a median position in both space (north/south) and time (past/future), the city carries a symbolic force that Du Bois links to its positionality. It is neither of the North nor of the South entirely, but, by virtue of its position exterior to both, it also participates in a few of the traits of each: industrialism of the North, marketplace for southern cotton, for instance.

Atlanta's past and future are equally alien to each other, and the city—as symbol of the spirit of its age—is poised on the knife-edge of choice between that shadowy past and bright future. How much of its degraded, dark past will the city combine with newly emerging realities in a unified identity that is taking shape even as Du Bois writes? This whiff of Hegelian dialectical thinking in Du Bois's analysis is made even stronger in his subsequent discussion where he emphasizes the spirit of self-interest and greed that animates an entire society, for which Atlanta stands as emblem, rather than give a detailed analysis of its political economy.

To communicate the character of that spirit and to stress its evolving disposition, however, Du Bois depends on making Atlanta the axis of several overlapping narrative structures. The first is a conceit he develops between the budding commercial spirit of the South as highlighted in the mythical tale of the winged huntress, Atalanta, who has announced that she will marry only the man who defeats her in a footrace. She eventually loses a race to Hippomenes, who slyly induces her to stop short of her goal by strewing



the racecourse with golden apples. Du Bois draws an unambiguous moral from Atalanta's deed: Pausing in the race (a term Du Bois plays on heavily) for short-term gain, she has traduced her high-minded virtue. But as a rhetorical figure, the myth of Atalanta twines around another narrative recounting the transition of southern agrarian feudalism into modern industrial capitalism. And the city, Atlanta, symbolizes the choice in both narratives, occupying the historical crossroad where the South is choosing between a "finer type of Southerner" and "vulgar money-getters"—nobility and honor on one side, "pretence and ostentation" on the other (56). Atlanta, the place, "typifies" this narrative of historical forces coming from a past that is far from exemplary and headed toward a future that is far from destined. Place serves as convenient shorthand for a complex historical process whose story remains unresolved and open-ended.

Near the chapter's midpoint, Du Bois brings to the fore yet another place whose narrative is less prominent in the new South but that functions as a counterweight to the growing spirit of selfishness and greed possessing capitalist Atlanta. On a single Atlanta hill not "crowned" with a factory stands Atlanta University, a place symbolizing the values of scholarly balance, proportion and pursuit of ideals of justice, order and hard work.

On one [hill], toward the west, the setting sun throws three buildings in bold relief against the sky. The beauty of the group lies in its simple unity:—a broad lawn of green rising from the red street with mingled roses and peaches; north and south, two plain and stately halls; and in the midst, half hidden in ivy, a larger building, boldly graceful, sparingly decorated, and with one low spire. It is a restful group,—one never looks for more; it is all here, all intelligible. (58)

Emphasizing the modesty and lack of ostentation in its building, Du Bois presents the university as unfolding a rival narrative over against Atlanta's quest for gold. As a place, the university represents a self-disciplined and even ascetic contradiction to the commercial spirit of the city. By sharpening the contrast between these two competing places, Du Bois extends his critique of Booker T. Washington's program of vocational education. The "true college," says Du Bois, "will ever have one goal,—not to earn meat, but to know the end and aim of that life which meat nourishes" (58–59). Du Bois does not spurn vocational education altogether, but Atlanta University will provide the social and cultural leadership for the commercial enterprise.

The function of the university is not simply to teach bread-winning, or to furnish teachers for the public schools, or to be a centre of polite society; it is, above all, to be the organ of that fine adjustment between real life and the growing knowledge of life, an adjustment which forms the secret of civilization. (60)

Du Bois then closes his defense of a liberal-arts education by returning to the organizing narrative of Atalanta's disappointing decision to stoop for the gold. But now

he changes the narrative itself, giving Atalanta and Atlanta *both* a different future. The university, he declares, will serve as the "wings of Atalanta" for the new South: "They alone can bear the maiden past the temptation of golden fruit" (60). The narrative not only lends the place its emblematic importance but is itself capable of amendment to imagine a better future than the one the narrative authorizes.

Dougherty County, Georgia, is another place with a distinctive figurative role in *The Souls of Black Folk*. In two important chapters, "Of the Black Belt" and "Of the Quest of the Golden Fleece," Du Bois ties his analysis to events, persons or observations he made while traveling through that county. Further, the county crops up at other points in *Souls* to illustrate the impact that both inadequate education and economic exclusion have had on the life of Negroes in the rural South. Du Bois places such emphasis on Dougherty County because it is the center of a state where "now and yesterday, the Negro problems have seemed to be centered. . . ." But even if the county stands as the "center of the center," its historical function, not its location, is Du Bois's primary concern. His repeated strategy in analyzing the county is to interleave descriptions of place with the historical backstory from which the place derives its emblematic relevance, so that when he calls the county "historic ground," his method in fact reverses the order of the terms: Place derives its importance from its historical context (75).

Du Bois's depiction of the county seat, Albany, epitomizes his method. Having located the region with his favored formula of in-between—"two hundred miles south of Atlanta, two hundred miles west of the Atlantic"—and then, identifying Albany's position at a bend in the Flint River, he moves quickly to its history: Andrew Jackson crossed the Flint to "avenge the Indian Massacre at Fort Mims" and to expropriate the Creek lands for Georgia, setting the stage for a flood of white settlers after the panic of 1837 who deported the Indians (76–77). Against that narrative backdrop, Du Bois inserts a sociological observation on Albany's racial divide: A city with a mainly white population is surrounded by a black peasantry who stream into town on Saturdays for shopping and entertainment. But then Du Bois instigates an unusual rhetorical reversal; rather than treat the black population as the residents of a countryside with all its presumed timeless, pastoral rhythms, he extends the definition of "city" to the country.

Once upon a time we knew country life so well and city life so little, that we illustrated city life as that of a closely crowded country district. Now the world has well-nigh forgotten what the country is, and we must imagine a little city of black people scattered far and wide over three hundred lonesome square miles of land, without train or trolley, in the midst of cotton and corn, and wide patches of sand and gloomy soil. (77–78)

With his familiar "once upon a time" gambit, Du Bois coaxes his readers toward considering Dougherty's country peasants as inhabiting a sprawling urban landscape. As with any city, the county will have founding moments, a unique development and an open future. Moreover, by establishing an urban frame for his ensuing tour through

the county, he renders his analysis as an inventory of urban blight. Rather than a ritual journey through a sequence of fixed stations, Du Bois's sociological and economic survey of Dougherty County evaluates its historical moment. Victimized by "systematic modern land-grapping," rack-rents and financial swindles, the black population is participating in an ongoing transformation; its current despair is not a permanent condition. And there are causes for hope: The Bolton prison farm lies in ruins, an English syndicate that began its enterprise after the Civil War is now bankrupt; and Du Bois even departs from one stock farm with the "comfortable feeling that the Negro is rising" (84). The crucial point is that Du Bois does not treat Dougherty County as a place exempt from historical change; rather, the story of the place is paramount and its geographical settings are tropes whose meanings change with the rise and fall of slavery, the ebb and flow of economic prosperity and the impending "untold story" that is "shadowed with a tragic past, and big with future promise!" (81).

#### IV

It is important to observe that Du Bois gives greatest prominence to place in the middle chapters of *The Souls of Black Folk*. The initial three chapters adopt a more conceptual focus, where he lays out his theory of double consciousness and delivers his stinging rebuke of Booker T. Washington's accommodationist strategy. However, the middle chapters delve into the conditions that shape the current situation for African-Americans, and Du Bois employs several wide-ranging strategies that employ place as a convenient figure for the story of African-American striving that remains the book's central concern. In yoking narrative to place, Du Bois reframes the received traditions for regarding place as a static memorial to achieved values that merit uncritical emulation in the future. By emphasizing the human story that is already under way in a place and that will eventually transform the locale into a qualitatively different reality, he shifts the focus on place from commemoration of the past to an anticipation of its future. This approach toward the intersection of place and narrative keeps Du Bois more firmly aligned with the historicism of the 19th century that persistently sought to reveal the contours of a universal human drama. Further, that alignment with historicism makes his methods work against the grain of the modernists of his own time who elevated place as the element that controls the shape and contour of narrative.

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# Desegregating the City of Brotherly Love: Raymond Pace Alexander and the Civil Rights Struggle in Philadelphia

BY DAVID A. CANTON

The January 1965 issue of *The Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* published a 14-page study titled "The Negro in Philadelphia." The *Bulletin* story recounted an experience of Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander, the first African-American woman attorney in Pennsylvania, when she was an undergraduate at the University of Pennsylvania. In December 1918, Sadie Tanner Mossell asked Raymond Pace Alexander, a classmate, to escort her and two friends visiting from Cornell University to the movie theater. When the friends arrived in Philadelphia, a day before the show, Raymond and the male friend purchased four tickets to the Schubert Theater in downtown Philadelphia. The next day, when the young men presented their tickets to the theater's manager, he prohibited the four from entering. He told them that there was a mistake and some other people had purchased their tickets for the same seats. Furious, "Alex began excitedly talking in Spanish" and the three others "chimed in with French phrases." After they displayed their foreign-language proficiency, the theater manager said, "Why, they are not Niggers!" and allowed the four students to enter the theater. Once they entered, they looked over at the seats they had purchased and noticed that they were empty. After the incident, the two students, Raymond Pace Alexander and Sadie Tanner Mossell, declared, "If we ever become lawyers, we are going to break this thing—segregation and discrimination. And, yes—we are going to open up those restaurants, too. You just wait! Just wait!"<sup>1</sup> This "theater incident" represented just one of many racial barriers that African-Americans encountered during the first two decades of the 20th century.

The theater incident occurred six months after W. E. B. Du Bois wrote his famous "Close Ranks" editorial for *Crisis*, the magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Du Bois requested that African-Americans must "forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder with our white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy." However, the white manager of the theater in Philadelphia had not read Du Bois's words and insisted on maintaining segregation. World War I was fought to make the world safe for democracy, but after the war, African-Americans continued to live in a nation that was unsafe and antiblack. Racial hostility ranged from lynching, race riots and murder in the South to de facto segregation and humiliation in public accommodations and political marginalization in the North. Black postwar expectations led to white backlash.<sup>2</sup>

When Americans reflect on the civil rights struggle, they immediately think of the southern movement, of Rosa Parks and Martin Luther King, Jr., Montgomery/Birmingham, the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Rights Act. From 1865 to 1965, the South was politically, socially, economically and culturally committed to white supremacy and de jure segregation. However, according to C. Vann Woodward, the New South, or modern white supremacy, started in Mississippi in 1890. Southern Democrats used race to destroy the Populist movement and disenfranchise poor whites and black voters. In 1890, a number of African-Americans from upper southern states such as Maryland and Virginia migrated to Philadelphia. The black population in the North had increased, but according to James Loewen, prior to 1890 northern whites blamed slavery and racism for black poverty. After slavery and Reconstruction, northern whites objected to living alongside African-Americans and blamed them for the nation's problems. Moreover, Rayford Logan argues that by 1890, as the black population in northern cities increased, white newspapers became "most preoccupied with crimes involving Negroes." Prior to the increase of the black population, white newspapers had focused on crimes committed by European immigrants.<sup>3</sup>

Ironically, it was the 1908 race riot in Springfield, Illinois, that prompted white and black liberals to form the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). Two years before the Springfield riot, a massive race riot occurred in Atlanta; but since whites, including liberals, perceived race riots as a "southern problem," there was no urgency to form the NAACP. The grandchildren of the abolitionists were shocked to discover that "southern-style racism" existed in the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln. During the Springfield riot, an African-American barber, whose wife was white, had used a shotgun to defend himself. The race rioters of the 60s were young African-American men who attacked property in the black community and who viewed the police as enemies. The race riots during the first 40 years of the 20th century were organized white mobs who attacked and brutalized African-American men who allegedly raped white women or murdered "uppity Negroes," successful African-Americans who did not know their place. According to C. Vann Woodward's seminal text *The Strange Career of Jim Crow*, "One of the strangest things about the career of Jim Crow was that the system was born

in the North and reached an advanced age before moving south in force." By 1830, most northern states had abolished slavery and replaced it with segregation, a system that denied African-Americans equal access to public resources, funds for education, relief and municipal employment. Whites segregated African-Americans in public spaces such as parks, theaters and other public accommodations. African-Americans in the North struggled continuously for civil rights following Reconstruction and Plessy.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the long history of civil rights activism in the urban North, it was the southern movement that caught media attention and spurred national action. The first generation of civil rights scholarship used a "top-down" approach and concentrated on male figures such as Martin Luther King, Jr., the role of the federal government and civil rights organizations. Charles Eagles argues that since a number of historians had participated in the civil rights movement, they were therefore empathetic, which made it difficult for them to be critical of the movement leaders, tactics or goals.<sup>5</sup> During the past 20 years, civil rights historiography working from the "bottom up," has emphasized the importance of grassroots activists, especially women leaders, and explored the tensions between civil rights leaders and organizations. The new approach has demonstrated African-American agency and organizational sophistication in southern black communities. Moreover, this perspective illustrates the federal government's slow response to civil rights activists' demands in the South. Historians have also examined the Cold War's ambiguous influence on the civil rights movement. Liberals, as well as U.S. State Department officials, insisted that segregation was inconsistent with democracy, but some U.S. officials suggested that Communists had infiltrated the civil rights movement. Some civil rights activists connected their struggle to that of Third World nations. The civil rights movement fought for the vote and to end Jim Crow, but in many communities, African-Americans fought for economic justice, too.<sup>6</sup>

Some scholars argue that the civil rights movement originated during the 1930s, which Jacquelyn Dowd Hall refers to as the "long civil rights movement" and Nikhil Singh calls the "long civil rights era." Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal provided jobs and opportunities for the black community. The New Deal allowed citizens to expect assistance from the federal government and gave labor the right to bargain with their employers. Although the New Deal adopted race-neutral policies, southern Democrats made sure that it did not disrupt white supremacy. Southern Democrats prohibited sharecroppers and domestics, the bulk of the black work force, from getting Social Security or a minimum wage. In order to pass New Deal legislation, northern Democrats allowed southern Democrats to govern themselves. Historians of the long civil rights movement center agency on external forces such as the Great Depression, the federal government, labor and the New Deal. During the Roaring 20s, when the economy was relatively beneficial for most middle-class Americans, most white skilled laborers and corporations, the federal government and the aforementioned groups were not concerned about racial equality. While the New Deal assisted African-Americans, it also widened racial inequality, which led to riots in the 60s.<sup>7</sup>



Recent studies have begun to chronicle the civil rights struggle in the North, which existed simultaneously with the southern civil rights movement. By the mid-40s, the growing black population in northern cities began to protest black exclusion from beaches and amusement parks and from federally funded housing projects. Black voters provided black leaders political power that they transformed into municipal and union jobs and greater access to local and state resources. From 1940 to the 1980s, in New York, Oakland and Philadelphia, black activists and their white liberal allies organized civil rights movements to protest poor housing, schools and jobs for African-Americans. However, during the Black Power era, black civil rights activists castigated white liberals and organized to eradicate institutionalized racism.<sup>8</sup>

National media "discovered" the northern civil rights movement after the ghetto riots of the mid-1960s. The southern civil rights movement had used the media to show the world the atrocities, committed by white sheriffs, terrorist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan, landlords and governors in support of segregation and in defiance of federal law. When the media covered the social problems of the North, however, they defined the new leaders as militant black racists and disparaged the Black Power movement. This journalistic scapegoating of Black Power resonated in American popular culture and scholarship. However, a new wave of Black Power studies argues that Black Power had southern origins that included the tactic of self-defense. In fact, many of the Black Power figures were active in local struggles in the North that started during the 1950s. The post-World War II urban studies combined with the northern civil rights scholarship and new Black Power studies historicize the post-World War II structural causes of the 60s rebellion and the northern black struggle for equality. As Martha Biondi suggests, "The 'struggle for Negro rights' in postwar New York should be seen less as a precursor to the southern civil rights movement than as a backdrop to the Black Power era in the North." After World War II, black communities throughout the North struggled for equality, but the origins of the northern civil rights struggle and the Black Power era in the North are in post-World War I America.<sup>9</sup>

World War I had a major influence on African-Americans and was a major cause of the civil rights struggle in the North. Before World War I, 90 percent of the black population lived in the South. In most northern cities, the black community was not a threat to white political and economic power. As a result, race relations were relatively decent as long as African-Americans remained in their place. The onset of the Great War led to a precipitous decline in the number of European immigrants; the North had a labor shortage and employers were forced to recruit black labor. The first great migration from the rural South to the urban North began during the war. The "trend toward racism in the North was amply illustrated in the years immediately following the First World War." Northern cities were not prepared for the influx of African-Americans and instead of embracing these new American migrants, exhibited increasing segregation and white hostility.<sup>10</sup>

World War I radically changed race relations in the North. After the war, black veterans "returned to the nation fighting" for civil rights and some black veterans refused to obey Jim Crow laws, triggering race riots in southern cities. In 1915, D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation*, though praised for its cinematic sophistication, provided a racist interpretation of Reconstruction. Woodrow Wilson, a classmate of Griffith's at Johns Hopkins University, held a special viewing of the film in the newly segregated White House. African-Americans around the nation protested the film, and on April 19, 1915, William Monroe Trotter, editor of the *Boston Guardian*, a black newspaper, led "the first Negro march . . . of more than a thousand people through the streets of Boston and to the State House" to protest the film, but only the most "objectionable scenes" were censored. The summer of 1919 became known as the Red Summer because of the 25 race riots that occurred across America. Poet Claude McKay wrote "If We Must Die," encouraging African-Americans to "face the murderous, cowardly pack, pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!" During the 1920s, the Ku Klux Klan reached its peak with five million members, and the KKK marched in northern cities and in Washington, D.C., in 1925. Segregation created a "ghetto economy" that produced a black business elite, and between 1915 and 1917, African-Americans owned businesses making an estimated 2.2 billion dollars. Nevertheless, while some black businessmen benefited from segregation, the color line made life difficult for all African-Americans.<sup>11</sup>

According to August Meier, the term "New Negro," made famous by philosopher Alain Locke in 1925, may have first been used in an 1895 editorial in the *Cleveland Gazette*, a black newspaper. The editorial stated that "a class of colored people, the New Negro," had emerged and they had "education, refinement and money." The "New Negro" included educated African-American doctors, dentists, teachers, artists, businessmen and lawyers. As Locke described their politics, the New Negroes did not reject Booker T. Washington's accommodation and economic self-help but refused to tolerate segregation and second-class citizenship. He notes that the New Negro was "radical on race matters . . . a social protestant rather than a genuine radical." Some New Negroes, particularly West Indian born, such as journalists Hubert Harrison and Cyrill Briggs, embraced socialism and criticized black leaders who desired racial equality only in a capitalist state. However, in 1920, demanding full citizenship in a racist society was a radical concept.<sup>12</sup>

By the late 1920s, sociologist Monroe Work stated that there were 80,000 black professionals in the United States. During the 20s, New Negroes protested against racism and segregation and New Negro attorneys were in the forefront of this movement. Trained at prestigious white law schools, they opened their own firms to protect African-American civil rights, improve the status of black lawyers and assist NAACP lawyers. In her path-breaking essay "Black Lawyers and the Twentieth-Century Struggle for Constitutional Change," Darlene Clark Hine laments, "Historians have neglected to analyze the roles played by the individual local black attorneys who labored behind the scenes." In Philadelphia, one of those neglected attorneys was Raymond Pace Alexander, a key figure in the struggle for civil rights in that city.<sup>13</sup>

The leading roles played by a few African-American lawyers in dismantling segregation and obtaining civil rights are well known. Charles Hamilton Houston, head counsel for the NAACP Legal Committee; William Hastie, the first African-American federal appointed judge; and Thurgood Marshall, who would become the first African-American Supreme Court Justice, achieved legal victories of national significance. Alexander's civil rights struggle in Philadelphia complements the work accomplished by his nationally known colleagues and demonstrates the post-World War I origins of the civil rights struggle in the North. While Supreme Court rulings applied to the entire nation, Alexander's civil rights struggle in Philadelphia sought to improve black employment, housing and educational opportunities for African-Americans in Philadelphia. Alexander's civil rights struggle laid the foundation for that city's civil rights and Black Power movements.<sup>14</sup>

Raymond Pace Alexander was born in Philadelphia's seventh ward, the black neighborhood that was made famous by W. E. B. Du Bois's 1899 classic sociological study *The Philadelphia Negro*. Alexander, the grandson of slaves, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1917 and Harvard Law School in 1923. He had synthesized three major political ideologies in African-American history. He advocated Booker T. Washington's economic self-help, Du Bois's political agitation and Marcus Garvey's race pride. Like most black professionals, Alexander served predominantly black clients. However, black doctors, teachers and dentists worked in an all-black environment, while Alexander worked in an all-white judicial system. He had to convince both black and white Americans that he was a qualified attorney. Black newspapers highlighted his court victories in order to demonstrate his competence as well as his service to the race. Alexander fought to improve professional opportunities for black lawyers, who faced hostile white judges and juries and who enjoyed limited professional choices. Raymond Pace Alexander and other younger militant attorneys struggled to improve their status in American law and in the black community.<sup>15</sup>

From 1920 to 1930, the number of black attorneys in Philadelphia had increased from 13 to 30, though during the same decade, the number of black attorneys in New York had increased from 50 to 103. It was more difficult for black than for white law school graduates to gain entry to the Pennsylvania bar, because it required a photograph with each application. According to Carter G. Woodson, in Cleveland, New York and Boston, black lawyers actively participated in the white local bar. In southern cities, such as Baltimore, Maryland, and Wilmington, Delaware, white attorneys prohibited black attorneys from joining the white bar association. In Philadelphia, black attorneys joined the bar, but beyond the courtroom, black and white attorneys in the city rarely socialized. This pattern pervaded public space in "the city of brotherly love." In 1950, Alexander wrote:

Excepting only the restaurants in the John Wanamaker store and the Broad Street Station, a Negro in 1923 could not be served in the restaurant or café

of any first class hotels in Philadelphia, nor could he obtain food in any of the Central City restaurants. . . . I know it will surprise you to know that was the rule even in such great restaurants as the Horn & Hardart chain, Lintons, Childs and the like. The only place he could obtain food in central Philadelphia was in the Automats, which were color blind. . . . Restaurants away from the central section and those in the suburban area were even worse. Their method of refusal sometimes took the form of violence.<sup>16</sup>

Some white businesses posted signs saying "No Negroes allowed." The 1920s are noted for the Harlem Renaissance, but this decade also witnessed the birth of the northern civil rights struggle.

During the 1920s, African-Americans in northern cities hired black attorneys and used the courts to fight for civil rights. It took Alexander, the black community and white allies 40 years to eliminate de jure segregation in Philadelphia's schools, public parks, restaurants, hotels, theaters and beaches. Northern civil rights activists also sought to increase the number of black employees in municipal service, well before the federal government endorsed equal opportunity in employment. Northern advocates of civil rights pressed not only for equal access to public facilities, such as parks and pools, but also for equal distribution of public services such as relief. In this view, equal rights were inherent in American citizenship. Alexander's achievements in Philadelphia came not only in the courtroom but also through the voting booth and on the city council. The combination of voting with litigation and protest proved potent for black Philadelphians.

The northern civil rights struggle can be divided into three stages. The first phase began during the 1920s and ended by the mid 1930s. Civil rights leaders fought to force northern states to enforce their state Equal Rights laws. After the Compromise of 1877, the Republican Party abandoned African-Americans and focused on reuniting the nation. In 1883, the United States Supreme Court declared the 1875 Civil Rights Act unconstitutional. In response, between 1885 and 1905, 18 northern states passed Equal Rights laws making segregation a crime; but these laws were not consistently enforced unless African-Americans protested. Nevertheless, Pennsylvania's 1877 Equal Rights Law provided Alexander with a basis for filing suits against discrimination. Alexander's civil rights cases, the boycotts and the black vote assisted the passing of the 1935 Pennsylvania Equal Rights Law. According to Alexander, unlike the 1887 law, this law had "some nasty sharp-edged teeth."<sup>17</sup>

The second phase of the northern civil rights struggle began during World War II and ended in 1960. Black labor leader A. Philip Randolph threatened a mass demonstration on the Capitol protesting segregation in hiring at war plants, forcing President Franklin Delano Roosevelt to issue Executive Order #8802, which prohibited discrimination in federal employment and by plants holding federal contracts and established the Fair Employment Practices Commission (FEPC). During the 40s, a number of northern

states passed their own FEPC laws. Since the 30s, African-Americans had organized "Don't Buy Where You Can't Work" campaigns using consumer boycotts to force white businesses to hire African-Americans. After the Great Depression, civil rights activists and black leaders viewed employment as a civil right.<sup>18</sup>

The final phase of the northern civil rights struggle started in 1960, the same year as the direct-action protests in the South. African-Americans in northern cities remained in low-paying jobs, poor neighborhoods and inadequate schools. Taking a cue from the southern movement, northern local leaders used demonstrations to protest these inequities, but they were unable to capture national attention. In August 1964, an African-American woman in North Philadelphia went into a white-owned store and got into an argument with the proprietor. The owner called the police, who arrested the woman, but a rumor circulated that they had murdered her. During the next two nights, a riot started and the mayor issued a curfew. The next week, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported that the riot was caused by "alleged police brutality and lack of jobs." The 1964 Philadelphia race riot foreshadowed the unrest that soon engulfed many other cities. Most civil rights scholarship views the Watts riot of 1965 as the event that marked the beginnings of Black Power, when, in fact, it was ushered in by the Philadelphia race riot of 1964.<sup>19</sup>

Alexander's ideological transformation is a major theme of his story. During the 1920s and 1930s, he was a race radical, who used litigation and supported mass protests to obtain civil rights for African-Americans. Starting in the 20s, the NAACP launched a successful litigation campaign to desegregate graduate and professional schools in the South. Pullman Porters unionized and engaged in community-based political activism to improve their wages and working conditions. Litigation was Alexander's main tactic. In Philadelphia, he used the courts and, unlike Walter White of the NAACP, embraced mass politics and allowed leftist organizations to participate in local movements. The NAACP's legal campaigns were successful, but the Great Depression forced black leaders to consider using mass-based protest to demand change. Kenneth Mack argues that civil rights scholarship has created a dichotomy between legalism and such protests. As a result, all black lawyers are categorized as anti-mass-based protest and the claim that "lawyers deradicalize social movements" has proceeded with little sustained analysis of lawyers' everyday work. In fact, during the apogee of Alexander's radicalism, he was "sympathetic to the radical's arguments" and synthesized "legalism with mass politics." Consequently, Alexander built coalitions in Philadelphia with the left and the black masses. However, after World War II and during the Cold War, he shifted to racial reform and avoided working with the left. Alexander believed in racial uplift, but, unlike many of his contemporaries, he did not blame poor blacks for their condition. As Kevin Gaines notes, "Black lawyers were solidly in the more group-oriented uplift tradition of socially responsible education."<sup>20</sup>

Alexander did not always follow national black leaders. His political differences with them were generational. When he returned to Philadelphia to practice law in 1923,

he was critical of black leaders, such as John Asbury, who failed to demand more from the city's white political machine. Alexander recalled that there were two generations of black attorneys. Lawyers such as Asbury belonged to the "older Negro Bar," those who passed the Pennsylvania Bar before 1920. The 13 lawyers who, like himself, had passed the bar between 1920 and 1933, and "had been trained at the larger and more prominent schools and universities of the North," belonged to the Philadelphia Bar Association. The New Negro generation of lawyers, who were aided by a larger black vote, demanded more political patronage for themselves and the community. When the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee formed in 1960, older black ministers did not agree with direct-action tactics. Thurgood Marshall, who had witnessed the devastating impact of southern race riots, took a "negative view of King's rhetoric and mass protests . . . and after the successful Montgomery Bus Boycott, he "grew irritated at the front-page attention being showered on King." The black ministers' views of SNCC and Marshall's view of King were shaped by the experiences of their generation. As Alexander aged, he had similar sentiments about Black Power, and on numerous occasions he felt that he had never received the recognition that he deserved.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, Alexander's New Negro generation took full advantage of the new political and economic opportunities for the black elite. In 1948, Harry S. Truman and the Democratic Party made a strong commitment to civil rights. In 1947, Truman had appointed a 15-member committee called the Committee on Civil Rights, and they published a document titled "To Secure These Rights." Truman appointed Alexander's wife, Sadie Tanner Mossell, to the committee. When he appointed her, the Alexanders were Republicans, but after her appointment, both joined the Democratic Party, and Raymond Alexander immediately started campaigning for Truman. In 1948, a federal judgeship fell vacant. Alexander and William Hastie were the two front-runners, but Truman appointed Hastie, who was a lifelong Democrat. Alexander was nationally known in black America but locally respected in white America. In Philadelphia, however, he was extremely influential and played a major part in the city's reform movement, a coalition of black and white middle-class liberals who challenged the city's governing Republican machine.<sup>22</sup>

The Cold War provided career opportunities for black elites in the Foreign Service. Prior to the Cold War, the only position African-Americans obtained was in Haiti. The Cold War forced the United States to improve its image to the world on race relations. As a result, during the 1940s and 1950s, Alexander wrote numerous letters to government officials trying to obtain work in the Foreign Service. In 1965, the U.S. State Department hired him as a Special Assistant, and he traveled to the Far East to discuss race relations. Alexander criticized American racism; however, when Communist governments discussed the subject, Alexander dismissed their statements as propaganda. His Far East speeches emphasized racial cooperation and not racial tension, the image that Asians had received in the media. Alexander was rehired by the State Department in 1968 to serve as an American Specialist to the Middle East. In lectures before Middle East audiences, he discussed the impact of the civil rights movement and the peril of

institutionalized poverty and racism. Alexander's two stints with the State Department tracked the ideological shift that King made after 1965.

Alexander provided the groundwork for the civil rights generation and next wave of black lawyers in Philadelphia. African-American activists of the 60s used the same tactics—boycotting, voting, picketing or protesting—that were used throughout the 20th century. Historical understanding can bridge the ideological gap between generations. Alexander and the younger leaders desired the same goals—black equality—but they disagreed over tactics. Black equality connotes equal access to education, jobs and health care. Alexander sought to eliminate de jure segregation and have the state enforce equity. Boycotts used the power of the black dollar for African-Americans to get jobs in white-owned businesses. Many Black Power and civil rights activists of the 1960s no longer saw the world through Alexander's perspective. The young activists were not aware of the amount of segregation that had existed in Philadelphia during the 1920s nor of how much Alexander had done to expand opportunities for black lawyers and the black community in the city.

In order to comprehend Alexander's impact on the civil rights struggle in Philadelphia, one must understand how the white community denied resources to the black community in Philadelphia. During the 1920s, the city was extremely racist. Assaults by white citizens on black citizens were frequent occurrences, especially in public places of recreation. Black neighborhoods lacked public parks, decent schools and police protection. Alexander understood how the city government had systematically denied public resources to African-Americans, despite their being voters and taxpayers. Working downtown and in City Hall, he learned how white power worked. From 1923 to 1960, Alexander fought to desegregate the city and to ensure that it provided its black residents with their fair share of resources.

The origin of the urban crisis, the northern civil rights struggle and Black Power began during the 1920s. It took years of legal, political and mass-based activism to desegregate northern cities. Alexander's civil rights struggle reflected the political ideology of the day. During the 30s, he supported mass-based politics; after World War II and during the Cold War, he advocated litigation and voting. The civil rights struggle in Philadelphia consisted of civil rights cases, criminal cases, school and public-accommodation desegregation, coalition building and electoral activism. Toward the end of Alexander's life, he became more critical of liberal whites and cognizant of the impact of black poverty. Like most African-Americans, the longer he lived the more he became aware of what novelist Ralph Ellison refers to as "the changing same of racism." In 1971 Senior Judge Raymond Pace Alexander spoke at the NAACP's Testimonial Dinner. His speech mentioned how he had used a "nonviolent, yet vigorous action rather than . . . explosive methods" to obtain civil rights. He believed that his "approach to these problems was right" and said he still had "faith in God and my country." Alexander promised his audience that he could answer all of their questions in a "full biography of my life," but he died before the biography was completed.<sup>23</sup>



## Notes

<sup>1</sup> UPT 50 A 74 Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Box 1, Folder 6, *The Philadelphia Bulletin* 24 Jan. 1965 in the Sadie Tanner Mossell Alexander Papers at the University of Pennsylvania Archives. I will refer to the papers of Raymond Pace Alexander as RPA Box # and Folder #.

<sup>2</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, "Close Ranks," *Crisis* (July 1918) in David Levering Lewis, *W. E. B. Du Bois: A Reader* (New York: Holt, 1995) 697.

<sup>3</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1971); James W. Loewen, *Sundown Towns: A Hidden Dimension of American Racism* (New York: New, 2005) 47; Rayford W. Logan, *The Betrayal of the Negro: From Rutherford B. Hayes to Woodrow Wilson* (New York: Da Capo, 1997) 217.

<sup>4</sup> Roberta Senechal, *The Sociogenesis of a Race Riot: Springfield, Illinois, in 1908* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1990); Mark Bauerlein, *Negrophobia: A Race Riot in Atlanta, 1906* (San Francisco: Encounter, 2001); Charles Flint Kellogg, *NAACP: A History of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People*, vol. 1 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1967); C. Vann Woodward, *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford UP, 1955) 17.

<sup>5</sup> For a historiography on the civil rights movement, see Charles W. Eagles, "Toward New Histories of the Civil Rights Era," *The Journal of Southern History* 66 (Nov. 2000): 815–48; Kevin Gaines, "The Historiography of the Struggle for Black Equality Since 1945" in Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig, eds., *A Companion to Post-1945 America* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2002); Richard Kluger, *Simple Justice: The History of Brown v. Board of Education and Black America's Struggle for Equality* (New York: Knopf, 1976); David J. Garrow, *Bearing the Cross: Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference* (New York: Morrow, 1986); August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *CORE: A Study in the Civil Rights Movement, 1942–1968* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1975); William C. Berman, *The Politics of Civil Rights in the Truman Administration* (Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1970).

<sup>6</sup> Clayborne Carson, *In Struggle: SNCC and the Black Awakening of the 1960s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1981); Michael Eric Dyson, *I May Not Get There with You: The True Martin Luther King, Jr.* (New York: Free, 2000); William Henry Chafe, *Civilities and Civil Rights: Greensboro, North Carolina, and the Black Struggle for Freedom* (New York: Oxford UP, 1980); John Dittmer, *Local People: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Mississippi* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1994); Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1995); Stephen G. N. Tuck, *Beyond Atlanta: The Struggle for Racial Equality in Georgia, 1940–1980* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 2001); Adam Fairclough, *Race & Democracy: The Civil Rights Struggle in Louisiana, 1915–1972* (Athens: U of Georgia P, 1995); Barbara Ransby, *Ella Baker and the Black Freedom Movement: A Radical Democratic Vision* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2003); Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2000); Aldon D. Morris, *The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement: Black Communities Organizing for Change* (New York: Free, 1984); Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, eds., *Groundwork: Local Black Freedom Movements in America* (New York: New York UP, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> Harvard Sitkoff, *A New Deal for Blacks: The Emergence of Civil Rights as a National Issue* (New York: Oxford UP, 1978); Jacquelyn Dowd Hall, "The Long Civil Rights Movement and the Political Uses of the Past," *The Journal of American History* 92 (Mar. 2005): 1235; Nikhil Pal Singh, *Black Is a Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy* (Cambridge, MA:

Harvard UP, 2004); Ira Katznelson, *When Affirmative Action Was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Norton, 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard, *Freedom North: Black Freedom Struggles Outside the South, 1940–1980* (New York: Macmillan, 2003); Arnold R. Hirsch, “Massive Resistance in the Urban North: Trumbull Park, Chicago, 1953–1966,” *The Journal of American History* 82 (Sept. 1995): 522–50; Victoria W. Wolcott, “Recreation and Race in the Postwar City: Buffalo’s 1956 Crystal Beach Riot,” *The Journal of American History* 93 (June 2006): 63–90; Thomas J. Sugrue, “Affirmative Action from Below: Civil Rights, the Building Trades, and the Politics of Racial Equality in the Urban North, 1945–1969,” *The Journal of American History* 91 (June 2004): 145–73; Martha Biondi, *To Stand and Fight: The Struggle for Civil Rights in Postwar New York City* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2003); Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2003); Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2006).

<sup>9</sup> Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1999); Yohuru Williams, *Black Politics/White Power: Civil Rights, Black Power and Black Panthers in New Haven* (New York: Brandyswine, 2000); Jeffrey O. G. Ogbar, *Black Power: Radical Politics and African American Identity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2004); Peniel E. Joseph, ed., *The Black Power Movement: Rethinking the Civil Rights–Black Power Era* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Peniel E. Joseph, *Waiting ‘Til the Midnight Hour: A Narrative History of Black Power in America* (New York: Holt, 2006); Biondi, *Stand and Fight*, 2.

<sup>10</sup> Woodward, *Strange Career*, 114.

<sup>11</sup> Mark R. Schneider, *We Return Fighting: The Civil Rights Movement in the Jazz Age* (Boston: Northeastern UP, 2002); Kevin Boyle, *Arc of Justice: A Saga of Race, Civil Rights, and Murder in the Jazz Age* (New York: Holt, 2004); Robert H. Brisbane, *The Black Vanguard: Origins of the Negro Social Revolution, 1900–1960* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1970) 42; William M. Tuttle, *Race Riot: Chicago in the Red Summer of 1919* (New York: Atheneum, 1970); Robert V. Haynes, *A Night of Violence: The Houston Riot of 1917* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1976); Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915–1930* (New York: Oxford UP, 1967); Robert E. Weems, *Desegregating the Dollar: African American Consumerism in the Twentieth Century* (New York: New York UP, 1998) 10.

<sup>12</sup> August Meier, *Negro Thought in America, 1880–1915: Racial Ideologies in the Age of Booker T. Washington* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1963) 258; Alain Locke, ed., *The New Negro* (New York: Atheneum, 1992) 11; Winston James, *Holding Aloft the Banner of Ethiopia: Caribbean Radicalism in Early Twentieth-Century America* (New York: Verso, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> Monroe Work, “The Negro in Business and the Professions,” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 80 (Nov. 1928): 140; J. Clay Smith, *Emancipation: The Making of the Black Lawyer, 1844–1944* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993); Darlene Clark Hine, “Black Lawyers and the Twentieth-Century Struggle for Constitutional Change” in John Hope Franklin and Genna Rae McNeil, eds., *African Americans and the Living Constitution* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian, 1995) 34.

<sup>14</sup> Genna Rae McNeil, *Groundwork: Charles Hamilton Houston and the Struggle for Civil Rights* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1983); Gilbert Ware, *William Hastie: Grace Under Pressure* (New York: Oxford UP, 1984); Juan Williams, *Thurgood Marshall: American Revolutionary* (New York: Times, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Fitzhugh Lee Styles, *Negroes and the Law in the Race's Battle for Liberty, Equality and Justice Under the Constitution of the United States* (Boston: Christopher, 1937); Walter J. Leonard, *Black Lawyer: Training and Results, Then and Now* (Boston: Senna, 1977); Geraldine R. Segal, *Blacks in the Law: Philadelphia and the Nation* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1983); J. Clay Smith, Jr., ed. *Rebels in Law: Voices in History of Black Women Lawyers* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Charles Ashley Hardy, "Race and Opportunity: Black Philadelphia During the Era of the Great Migration, 1916–1930," diss. Philadelphia: Temple U, 1989, 283–84; Carter G. Woodson, *The Negro Professional Man and the Community* (New York: Negro UP, 1969) 199; RPA, "The Struggle Against Racism in Philadelphia from 1923–1948" 2, RPA Box 97, Folder 19.

<sup>17</sup> The 18 states were Illinois (1885), Connecticut (1884), Iowa (1884), New Jersey (1884), Ohio (1884), Colorado (1885), Indiana (1885), Massachusetts (1885), Michigan (1885), Minnesota (1885), Nebraska (1885), Rhode Island (1885), Pennsylvania (1887), New York (1893), Washington (1890), Wisconsin (1895), California (1897), Kansas, (1905). Gilbert Thomas Stephenson, *Race Distinctions in American Law* (New York: Appleton, 1910); Alexander quote in the *Philadelphia Tribune* 11 Apr. 1935.

<sup>18</sup> Paula F. Pfeffer, *A. Philip Randolph: Pioneer of the Civil Rights Movement* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1990); Robert Rodgers Korstad, *Civil Rights Unionism: Tobacco Workers and the Struggle for Democracy in the Mid-Twentieth-Century South* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 24 Aug. 1964.

<sup>20</sup> Beth Tompkins Bates, *Pullman Porters and the Rise of Protest Politics in Black America, 1925–1945* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2001); Mark V. Tushnet, *The NAACP's Legal Strategy against Segregated Education, 1925–1950* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1987); Kenneth W. Mack, "Law and Mass Politics in the Making of the Civil Rights Lawyer, 1931–1941," *The Journal of American History* 93.1 (June 2006): 38–39; Kevin K. Gaines, *Up-lifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1996) 238.

<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Thurgood Marshall* 247–48; RPA, "John M. Langston Law Club," *The Shingle* (Dec. 1951): 233–34 in RPA Box 97, Folder 23; *The Philadelphia Tribune* 9 May 1925; *Pittsburgh Courier* 23 May 1925.

<sup>22</sup> Michael L. Krenn, *Black Diplomacy: African Americans and the State Department, 1945–1969* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 1999); Countryman, *Up South* 1.

<sup>23</sup> RPA, Box 99, Folder 44; Ralph Ellison, quoted in Singh, *Black Is a Country* 55.

# Searching for Ambrose: Genealogy, Biography and African-American Place in the Historical Narrative

BY DINA MAYO-BOBEE

In July 2006, two days before the end of the summer semester, I addressed the topic of Reconstruction with a group of undergraduates more interested in counting down the final minutes of the day than in listening to another lecture. After all, this was just a Gen. Ed. survey course looking at American civilization to 1877, and each of the students, mostly seniors, was admittedly taking the class only for the required "history credits." Hoping to finally spark an interesting class discussion, I scheduled an airing of the PBS documentary *Reconstruction: The Second Civil War*.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, as in the textbook I had assigned, the documentary highlighted the discrimination and violence black people experienced during Reconstruction, and little more. It rushed the viewer from the failure of Reconstruction to the civil rights movement of the 1960s, with very little commentary on African-American life in between.

Compensating for the lack of information pertaining to African-American culture after emancipation, I decided to mention some of the findings from my latest genealogical research. To show that African-Americans were able to live meaningful and productive lives in spite of white racism and Jim Crow segregation, I related what I had recently learned about a farmer named Ambrose McCaskill who was born in antebellum South Carolina. Ambrose owned land, raised children and grandchildren and helped create a close-knit community on property still possessed by the family. To my surprise and

delight, students were intrigued by this brief account, and one young man even uttered an audible "Wow" when I pointed out that Ambrose and his wife had managed to live full lives through the Civil War, Reconstruction and World War I in rural, segregated South Carolina, the birthplace of secession. Even if it was dismissed by some of the students, this aspect of African-American history was certainly new to them all.

The need for improvisation underscores a problem that faces instructors who must challenge unbalanced depictions of African-Americans inside and outside the classroom. In this article, in addition to examining deficiencies in mainstream coverage of black culture, I will look at Ambrose and his family across four generations, and explore the value of reconstructing personal histories. Last, I will examine how historians are recovering neglected elements of African-American culture and the ways that genealogists have contributed to our ever-increasing knowledge of cultural development in the United States.

The dearth of information in textbooks, as it pertains to the lives of African-Americans after Reconstruction, was examined by Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Robert Weems in 1994. Based on an analysis of 14 popular U.S. history survey textbooks, they concluded that the "texts often depict African-Americans as victims, rather than as historical actors" because textbook writers rely on "the *race relations paradigm*, which examines the lives, history, and experiences of people of African descent by focusing on their relationship to people of European descent."<sup>2</sup> On average, they found that these textbooks devoted only 15 percent of their pages to content regarding African-Americans, only 11 percent of their illustrations featured African-Americans, and only 6 percent of the suggested readings listed works about African-Americans.

Among the textbooks surveyed was the text I had assigned to my class, *Nation of Nations* by James W. Davidson et al. In 1994, the book had a higher than average number of pages featuring discussions about African-Americans at 20 percent, but a lower than average percentile of its illustrations and subheadings; and only 8 percent of its suggested readings dealt with African-Americans.<sup>3</sup> While the book seems to have made improvements in its coverage of black culture, insufficiencies still exist.<sup>4</sup> As the study goes on to explain, since textbooks overwhelmingly emphasize interracial contention in their already limited coverage of African-Americans, discourse regarding the building of black communities, domestic life, economics, education and cultural achievement is omitted.<sup>5</sup>

Not only are representations of African-Americans "warped" in college textbooks, as the aforementioned report indicates, but the same inadequacies exist at other levels of education.<sup>6</sup> For example, a 1998 evaluation of 44 high school students was conducted to gauge their perceptions of historical actors, the significance of historical events and the reliability of secondary sources. The results revealed that the students, white and black, developed viewpoints and judged textbook histories based on what they had learned from family and personal experience. White students' perceptions were commensurate with textbook material, since the books confirmed what they learned at home, but the

African-American students rejected "school-based historical accounts as 'white people's history,'" because the information was inconsistent with what they had been taught by parents and grandparents. Terrie Epstein, who conducted the 1998 study, suggested that U.S. history could be taught "as a narrative in which racial and/or [different] ethnic groups' experiences simultaneously were inextricably entwined and decisively different." Regrettably, however, though accurately concluding that students' perceptions and "partial views" should be challenged by "the consideration and integration of the other's" sociocultural experiences, Epstein fails to venture beyond economic, political and social discrimination as the *sine qua non* for African-American inclusion in the high school curriculum.<sup>7</sup>

Nor is the problem exclusive to textbook histories. Unlike Epstein, for whom the inclusion of African-American culture is contingent on interracial relations, Mae Henderson admits that a new approach to black cultural studies is needed in academia to counteract the "particularizing and homogenizing" assumptions that result from what some academics refer to pejoratively as "'victim' or 'oppression' studies." Henderson argues that we should uncover the "vernacular traditions [and] indigenous principles . . . that reflect the geographical and historical specificities of blacks in the United States," but urges us to show caution that we do not scorn or marginalize the scholarship that established black studies in the academy to begin with.<sup>8</sup>

Yet, 12 years after Cha-Jua and Weems exposed the scarcity of African-American agency and imagery in textbooks, the problem has not been solved. To complicate matters, some academics turn the argument around and use the focus on interracial relations and tension to berate ethnic or minority studies. In his investigation of the campaign against cultural pluralism in historiography and academia, Herbert Shapiro censures the jeremiads of historians Eugene Genovese, Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and C. Vann Woodward. According to Shapiro, longing for the top-down, Eurocentric interpretations of the past, these historians disparage ethnic studies for introducing a "cult of victimization, inflammable sensitivity, alibi-seeking and self-pity" and call for scholars to return to a historical orthodoxy that purges historical interpretation and the academy of the ethnocentricity displayed by people of color.<sup>9</sup>

With this in mind, it is important that we strive to enhance current interpretations of African-American culture, while avoiding an uncritical appropriation of the rhetoric employed by those whose goal is to control the scholarly discourse pertaining to black culture and censor academic freedom in the process. Slavery, colonization, segregation, lynching and disenfranchisement are all part of the African-American experience in the United States, but it is equally important that we become acquainted with the social values and priorities that emerged independent of or in spite of the disruptive effects of interracial turmoil. In order to disseminate a comprehensive and informative rendition of African-American place in U.S. history, we must be able to position black men and women within the diverse contexts and autonomous institutions that were essential to their historical development.

This was my reason for introducing Ambrose to my students—they were hearing only one side of the story. My genealogical research transcended its esoteric significance when I used it to conflate a history of black autonomy and agency with the prevailing narrative. What students were told about Ambrose contrasted starkly with the story of Benjamin Montgomery, which began the textbook's chapter on Reconstruction. Montgomery, who in 1867 received lands from Joseph Davis, brother of Confederate president Jefferson Davis, used his managerial skills to build a thriving African-American community, only to see it destroyed when the land was recovered by Jefferson Davis when Reconstruction failed.<sup>10</sup> So, what was so fascinating about Ambrose that he found his way into the lexicon of persons outside my family?

To answer this, it is necessary to discuss something of Ambrose's life. My patrilineal ancestry became the concentration of my genealogical research because of the family's geographic location and the availability of oral histories. This side of my family is firmly rooted in Kershaw County, South Carolina, where my parents currently live, and where I attended high school and lived for three years. Kershaw County is known to Revolutionary War historians as the location of the Battle of Camden in 1780, which sealed British control of the South and led to the 1781 capture and imprisonment, in Camden, of future president Andrew Jackson. After Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860, the county raised paramilitary troops to support secession and suppress Unionist dissent.<sup>11</sup> After the Civil War, radical Republicans controlled the South Carolina legislature for close to a decade, during which time ex-slaves such as William and Frank Adamson represented Kershaw County, and some of the county's black politicians lost their lives at the hands of white redeemers.<sup>12</sup> No doubt, Ambrose witnessed or was privy to many of these events, because he lived all of his life just 20 miles northeast of Camden, in the town of Bethune, which was called Lynchwood until 1900.

Before I had ever heard of Ambrose, I was fortunate enough to learn that the name of my great-grandmother was Martha. I had regrettably never heard anything about Martha, nor had I ever met her oldest son, James, who was my grandfather. But with the help of census records, I was able to construct biographical sketches of their lives from 1900 through 1930.<sup>13</sup> While I have not yet been able to capture the previous ten years of her life, because of a fire and erroneous disposal of most of the 1890 census records, it became apparent that in 1900, sometime after her marriage and the birth of an unnamed baby girl, who possibly died in childhood, Martha had returned to her parents' home. For the remainder of her life, she lived in close proximity to her parents, and it is here that I first encountered her father, Ambrose.

The name of Ambrose's wife, Martha's mother, was never spelled the same way twice by census takers and could have been Myra, Mariah or Miriam. Nevertheless, she is listed, along with Ambrose, in every census record from 1870 to 1920. In 1870, she and Ambrose were in their early 20s and had three sons. According to census records, by 1880 the couple had more children, including Martha, who was born around 1873.<sup>14</sup> Based on the census, Martha was a 27-year-old widow in 1900.



Ambrose was born in 1844 and died in April of 1920, which accounts for his appearance on the 1920 census, which was taken on January 21. Martha died in 1922, but at the time of her death, the coroners and/or doctors who filled out death certificates were much more meticulous about recording information pertaining to men than to women. Neither the names of Martha's parents, their occupation and dates of birth, nor a signature from a close relative are present on her certificate. On the other hand, Ambrose's death certificate yielded exciting information that added another dimension to my research. I discovered that his mother's name was "Nancy Williams," which was the first time I encountered information reaching that far back in my ancestry.<sup>15</sup>

Upon reexamining the census, I located Nancy's name twice—once in 1870, when she was in her 50s, and again in 1900, when she was about 78 years old. Nancy, who was born about 1822, lived next door to Ambrose and his young family in 1870. Collectively, the census records revealed that over time, as the family expanded, it formed a concentric unit around its patriarchs and matriarchs, so that by 1900, after the family had grown and built new homes, the elderly Nancy was living only a few doors away from Ambrose and his wife.

Since the family maintained such close ties and proximity to one another, I was curious about the land they inhabited, and soon discovered one of Nancy's key contributions to the family's welfare and stability. County records show that in 1897, Nancy leased her son 500 acres of land for seven years. According to the lease, Ambrose promised to "furnish the said Nancy Williams with all the necessities of life (she being his mother) such as food and raiment . . . and also agrees that he will keep the fences thereon in good repair, look after her cattle, hogs, sheep, & c." and return the land on the first day of January 1904.<sup>16</sup> Nancy, therefore, had ownership and was in control of a great deal of land and livestock in post-Reconstruction South Carolina.

Nancy's reasons for relinquishing control, even temporarily, to her son are not stated, but part of her rationale was no doubt his business acumen and her faith in his abilities to provide and care for her. Ambrose's capacity to manage property and his family's needs became evident in several transactions that took place in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In 1899, for instance, Ambrose sold 120 acres of land for \$151 and purchased another 61 acres for \$122 in 1901. In 1908, he acquired another 121 acres for \$122 and in 1911 recovered the 121 acres that he had sold in 1899, for \$151, the amount he had received for it 12 years earlier.<sup>17</sup>

Ambrose could not write his name, so he left no letters or diaries explaining the reasons for his land acquisitions, but the purpose for purchasing the property soon became clear. In 1911, he sold his daughter Martha 55 acres of land for five dollars, stipulating that the property should pass to her heirs when she died. He willed his other children land as well, retaining control over their inheritance during his lifetime.<sup>18</sup> Ambrose was a farmer who appears to have had the talent and resourcefulness to exchange surplus crops or animals for cash and use the funds to purchase land to pass along to his children. Illiteracy was not a barrier to what appears to have been a successful and stable family

life. Ambrose was married to the same woman for more than 50 years, cared for his mother, provided for his children and left an inheritance for his descendants. Apparently, his strong sense of family passed on to his children, who held on to their property while they apportioned land to other family members with the same generosity.<sup>19</sup>

Martha lived only two years after her father's death, but she and her parents survived long enough to see her sons, James, Lonnie and Arthur, become young adults. In April 1917, six months after the U.S. declared war on Germany, the government passed the Selective Service Act requiring every male living in the U.S. between the ages of 18 and 45 to register for the draft. Martha's sons took part in the first registration on June 5, 1917, reserved for men born between 1886 and 1896. The registration cards reveal much about the course of the young men's lives. When signing the cards, James and Lonnie signed their names; and, in fact, James's signature appears on Ambrose's death certificate. However, Martha's youngest son, Arthur, had to leave his mark, indicating that James and Lonnie received some form of education that Arthur did not. Other changes included the fact that James was still single and caring for his mother, while Lonnie and Arthur were now married men. Both James and Arthur continued to farm the land, but their brother, Lonnie, had become a blacksmith.

James cared for Martha until her death in 1922, just as Ambrose had looked after Nancy. Sometime before his mother's death, James did marry, and by 1930, he and his wife had seven children, and his brother Arthur and his wife had six.<sup>20</sup> Although Lonnie was still a resident of Kershaw County in 1920, he no longer lived near the family homestead and, according to family members and the census, left South Carolina before the 1930s. Until his death in 1948, James continued to inhabit and farm the land that Ambrose had left his mother. He and his wife eventually raised ten children and lived long enough to see their oldest daughter get married and move to Lancaster, South Carolina, and their eldest sons fight in World War II. One received several awards for his service in the Pacific and Middle Eastern theaters of the war, and their youngest son, only 17 when his father died, went on to serve in the Korean War as a medic with the First Forward Observance Battalion, which advanced beyond the 38th Parallel into North Korea. All of James's children received educations and, except for his oldest daughter, left South Carolina in the 1940s and '50s.

Ambrose's legacy traveled to New England when, in the late 1940s, James's oldest son bought a home in Norwalk, Connecticut, where he and his wife raised three sons and lived until his death in 1997. Another son purchased and operated a bed-and-breakfast in Coos County, New Hampshire, which served as a family retreat and inn, until his widow sold the property shortly before her death in the late 1990s. Today, only two of James's children survive: a daughter, who lives in Florida and maintains close family ties in retirement, and his youngest son, who raised seven children, joined the March on Washington in 1963 and in 1972 returned to Kershaw County, where he and his wife currently reside. Through the years, he has also kept in the family the 55 acres that Ambrose left to Martha. Notably, for at least four generations, the family

belonged to the Bethel Baptist Church, where Ambrose, Martha, James and other family members are buried. In fact, some of Ambrose's descendants are active members of the church, including James's surviving daughter, who participates in church activities when visiting the area.

Like millions of African-American families, Ambrose and his descendants adhered to a work ethic that enabled them to accomplish their goals, and their lives are indicative of the fact that African-American culture was shaped by individuals with unique personalities and distinct goals. Black people in the rural South built homes, established strong familial bonds and created neighborhoods and kinship communities in which they could raise and nourish their children while establishing traditions independent of the dominant culture and its prejudices. Ambrose typifies the spirit and determination of untold numbers of black men who provided for their families in ways that exceeded their prospects. Nancy and Martha confirm the important role black women played in maintaining their families, exerting control over property and actively participating in the institutions that governed their lives.

Scholars have begun to focus more and more on African-American cultural autonomy in the post-Reconstruction South. Wilbert L. Jenkins looks at diversity among working-class freedmen in urban South Carolina and analyzes their patterns of life after slavery, while Tera W. Hunter examines black women's influence as wage earners and political activists. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore also discusses black women and the crucial part they played in building voluntary networks, political organizations and civil rights institutions after emancipation; and Thomas Holt's study of black political leadership in South Carolina explores the transference of authority from slavery to freedom.<sup>21</sup>

These are but a few of the studies that contribute to a more balanced portrayal of black culture, and they establish a historiographical fount from which textbook authors and documentarists can draw to give African-American society and traditions attention equal to that already devoted to Native and European American cultures.<sup>22</sup> The aforementioned works also rely on biographical information, which establishes agency and multiplicity. To construct the biographical profiles that add such texture and depth to our understanding of cultural development after emancipation, historians utilize census data, oral histories and public records.<sup>23</sup> Genealogists play an important role in making these valuable resources available. According to bibliographer Sheila O'Hare, "acceptance and collaboration" among genealogists and historians has resulted in a proliferation of the primary sources used by researchers. The Library of Congress Web site, American Memory, which contains at least 100 databases, resulted from the collaborative efforts of professional historians and local history organizations. Another indication of how the fields overlap is the growing number of academic Web sites that now provide links to genealogical database sites such as [ancestry.com](http://ancestry.com) and [familysearch.org](http://familysearch.org), even though, as O'Hare notes, there is little discussion regarding the benefits of collaboration.<sup>24</sup>

Yet, regardless of how tenuous or lukewarm the relationship between genealogists and historians may be, their work gives us a glimpse into the cultures and lifestyles that

rose from the ashes of Reconstruction. African-Americans have been telling their stories since before the founding of this nation, and beginning with the publication of the first slave narratives, biographical and autobiographical works have been the most cherished contributions to the African-American literary tradition.<sup>25</sup> Conversely, mainstream histories have been slow or reluctant to write African-Americans into the larger narrative of U.S. history; and while some progress has been made, vigilance in addressing the inadequacies that still exist is needed.

Until a comprehensive interpretation of African-American history is reflected in primary, secondary and college curricula, we must continue to challenge the monolithic depictions that remain ubiquitous in American society. This does not suggest that we reject conventional interpretations that focus on the struggle for racial and social equality that are stamped indelibly on the African-American past. Even then, however, this represents only a part of the story. We begin the process of enhancing and degeneralizing, and not romanticizing, black history when we propose that Ambrose McCaskill and Benjamin Montgomery be juxtaposed as different sides of the same story.<sup>26</sup> It is therefore incumbent upon us to broaden the focus of U.S. history to include the diversity of experience, lifestyles and perspectives that were essential to the development of African-American culture.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> *Reconstruction: The Second Civil War*, prod. Elizabeth Deane, WGBH Educational Foundation, 2004, digital videodisc.

<sup>2</sup> Sundiata Keita Cha-Jua and Robert E. Weems, Jr., "Coming into Focus: The Treatment of African Americans in Post-Civil War United States History Survey Texts," *The Journal of American History* 80.4 (Mar. 1994): 1408 (italics theirs).

<sup>3</sup> Cha-Jua and Weems 1410.

<sup>4</sup> To examine the content and the textbook's current treatment of African-Americans, see James W. Davidson, *Nation of Nations*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw, 2005) 206, 207, 224–27, 411–17, 497, 543–57.

<sup>5</sup> Cha-Jua and Weems 1408.

<sup>6</sup> Cha-Jua and Weems 1411.

<sup>7</sup> Terrie Epstein, "Deconstructing Difference in African Americans and European-American Adolescents' Perspectives on U.S. History," *Curriculum Inquiry* 28 (Winter 1998): 400, 418, 419, 420.

<sup>8</sup> Mae G. Henderson, "'Where, by the Way, Is This Train Going?': A Case for Black (Cultural) Studies," *Callaloo* 19 (Winter 1996): 63, 64, 66.

<sup>9</sup> Herbert Shapiro, "Political Correctness' and the U.S. Historical Profession" in Herbert Shapiro, ed., *African American History and Radical Historiography: Essays in Honor of Herbert Aptheker* (Minneapolis, MN: MEP, 1998) 324. Compare with C. Vann Woodward, *The Burden of Southern History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1993) 184.

<sup>10</sup> Davidson 530, 557.

<sup>11</sup> Bernard Bailyn et al., *The Great Republic: A History of the American People* (Boston: Little, 1977) 286–87; Manisha Sinha, *The Counterrevolution of Slavery: Politics and Ideology in Antebellum South Carolina* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 2000) 235.

<sup>12</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *Origins of the New South, 1877–1913* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1971); Thomas C. Holt, *Black Over White: Negro Political Leadership in South Carolina During Reconstruction* (Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1977) 90 n 72, 141.

<sup>13</sup> 1900 U.S. Census, Buffalo Township, Kershaw County, South Carolina.

<sup>14</sup> 1870 U.S. Census, Buffalo Township, Kershaw County, South Carolina.

<sup>15</sup> South Carolina DHEC Vital Records, Certificate of Death, 1920, 23:7911.

<sup>16</sup> Kershaw County Register of Deeds, Book UU, Page 687, February 3, 1897.

<sup>17</sup> Kershaw County Register of Deeds, Book ZZ, Page 426, March 11, 1899; Book DDD, Page 68, March 8, 1901; Book SSS, Page 412, January 17, 1908; Book AC, Page 367, February 9, 1911.

<sup>18</sup> Kershaw County Register of Deeds, Book AC, Page 632, January 28, 1911.

<sup>19</sup> See Kershaw County Register of Deeds, Book AK, Page 632, March 7, 1917.

<sup>20</sup> 1930 U.S. Census, Buffalo Township, Kershaw County, South Carolina.

<sup>21</sup> Wilbert L. Jenkins, *Seizing the New Day: African-Americans in Post-Civil War Charleston* (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1998); Tera W. Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Howard UP, 1997); Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896–1920* (Chapel Hill: U of North Carolina P, 1996); Holt. Compare these works with Herbert Shapiro's *White Violence and Black Response: From Reconstruction to Montgomery* (Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1988); Frank McGlynn and Seymour Drescher, eds., *The Meaning of Freedom: Economics, Politics, and Culture After Slavery* (Pittsburgh: U of Pennsylvania P, 1992); and C. Vann Woodward's influential *The Strange Career of Jim Crow* (New York: Oxford UP, 1996).

<sup>22</sup> For comparisons, see Davidson 2–24, 52–80, 89–97, 230, 411–12, 545–47.

<sup>23</sup> For example, see Hunter VIII and Holt 90 n 72.

<sup>24</sup> Sheila O'Hare, "Genealogy and History," *Common-Place* 2 (Apr. 2002): III, IV.

<sup>25</sup> The canon of African-American biography is extensive. Some of the most familiar include Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or, Gustavus Vassa, the African / Written by Himself*, 1794, Shelley Eversley, ed. (New York: Modern, 2004); Harriet A. Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* (Boston, 1861); Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass, Written by Himself. His Early Life as a Slave, His Escape from Bondage, and His Complete History to the Present Time, Including His Connection with the Anti-Slave Movement* (Hartford, CT: Park, 1881); Booker T. Washington, *Up from Slavery* (New York: Burt, 1901); and William J. Brown, *The Life of William J. Brown, of Providence, R.I.: With Personal Recollections of Incidents in Rhode Island 1883* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries P, 1971).

<sup>26</sup> For a somewhat conflicting analysis, see Clarence E. Walker's *Deromanticizing Black History: Critical Essays and Reappraisals* (Knoxville: U of Tennessee P, 1991).

# The Life and Death of William Meadows: Local Government Documents as Sources for Biography

BY JAN VOOGD

The role of place in shaping African-American biography can be a direct one. If, in a particular location, there is the sentiment, or the conscientiousness, to record information on people and events, stories will have the opportunity to survive. Local social conditions and politics can affect, adversely or positively, the recording of information and events. While oral history, newspaper accounts, letters and diaries are well-known resources for recovering history, there are others less well known, such as publications of local governments, that can offer much more verdant depths than might be expected.

William Meadows, a former slave, was one of the black representatives to Louisiana's Constitutional Convention in 1868. The year after the convention, he was shot and killed at his home in Claiborne Parish, in front of his family. The details of this criminal tragedy, including the eyewitness testimony of his wife, were captured in a contemporary state government publication, a report published by the General Assembly of Louisiana. A committee investigating the conduct of the elections recorded information about Meadows' murder, thereby ensuring that the details became part of the public record. This effort at the local level to record and preserve the information affords the truth the possibility of being discovered (LA General Assembly).



The story of William Meadows and the attention the Louisiana General Assembly devoted to it demonstrates the powerful role a particular place can have in the shaping of African-American biography. While certainly fascinating topics in and of themselves, the subject of this paper is not Meadows or the white terrorism that followed Reconstruction in Louisiana, but rather the historiography of those topics. The situation of William Meadows points out the local resources that scholars have, at best, underutilized, and, at worst, neglected, overlooked or ignored. Most of the secondary sources on the Reconstruction era, even those works specifically on Louisiana or the constitutional conventions of the time, barely mention William Meadows. If they do, it is but to say he was a Constitutional convention delegate who was a former slave, or that he was a farmer. Some sources mention that he was murdered the year after the convention. Only Allen Trelease, in his book *White Terror*, devotes a paragraph to Meadows. Yet Meadows was a key figure in the convention, and there are voluminous details about his murder to be found in the report of the Joint Committee (LA Constitutional Convention; LA General Assembly; Trelease 95).

The Joint Committee was organized at the end of July 1868, to investigate the violence and intimidation that occurred during the presidential election. The members of the committee were Hugh J. Campbell and W. L. Thompson of the Louisiana Senate, and E. S. Wilson, Peter Harper and William Murrell of the House of Representatives. The election in question was the contest between Ulysses S. Grant, Republican, and Horatio Seymour, Democrat. Prior to the election, supporters of Grant were being threatened with violence, to include death (LA General Assembly 3–4).

Working daily from 9 in the morning to 10 or 11 at night, through the months of August and September, the Joint Committee investigated the events surrounding the election. They examined 141 witnesses, read 81 letters from citizens and assembled 350 affidavits. They compiled statements from the press, as well. They made their report on September 24, 1868, and this report included verbatim witness testimony about many aspects of election-related violence, including descriptions of the reputation and murder of William Meadows. Much of the testimony in the report was obtained by the committee despite the fear of witnesses to come forward, because of the threat of violence, even death, at the hands of “lawless and disloyal” neighbors. Other witnesses insisted on the condition of anonymity for the same reason (LA General Assembly 5).

The committee believed that the murders and violence they found represented only a fraction of what actually occurred, and had their investigation lasted longer, they would have found many more “murders and outrages.” The committee concluded that the responsibility for the violence rested not only with the direct perpetrators but also with “that large and respectable class of people” who, out of apathy and silence, allow “such miscreants to roam at large unpunished” (LA General Assembly 6).

Howard White has described the atmosphere in Louisiana after the Civil War as one of hate, “created by decades of sectional bitterness and four years of fighting. . . . The most vexing of all questions in an atmosphere of political confusion and economic disruption

was the role of the Negro in the new order. Four million released slaves formed a veritable horde of displaced persons." Confederate leaders had left the state when the federal government moved in, "leaving rival factions ranging from conservative Democrats to Radical Republicans to battle for political control of Louisiana" (3, 6). Even before the Ku Klux Klan, Louisiana was home to the White Camellias, founded in St. Mary Parish in 1867 by Colonel Alcibiade DeBlanc. This was a French Creole neighborhood near New Orleans. The White Camellias were not as violent nor as secretive as the Klan, but they were as strong in their dedication to white supremacy (Trelease 93).

The Constitutional Convention on which William Meadows served resolved the following measures: It mandated universal desegregated education; it prohibited racial discrimination in public places; and it excluded French, forbidding any language other than English to be used for legal publications.

The most offending clause, according to most analysts, was "All persons shall enjoy equal rights and privileges upon any conveyance of a public character; and all places of business, or of public resort, or for which a license is required by either State, Parish, or Municipal authority, shall be deemed places of public character and shall be opened to the patronage of all persons, without distinction or discrimination on account of race or color." Joe Gray Taylor has noted the 1868 constitution as being more succinct, prescient and democratic than any of the constitutions that came before it. As he has said eloquently, "It was a constitution under which the state could have lived in peace had good men held office and had Louisiana whites been willing to accept Negroes as free and politically equal citizens. But the officeholders were too often venal, and in their hearts Louisiana whites had made no real concessions" (152, 155).

These measures offended not only white racists but also French Creoles, complicating the tension in certain parishes, as some French Creoles were black; hence the conventioners made enemies on both sides of the racial divide.<sup>1</sup> In Claiborne Parish, "on election days, it was unsafe for any man, white or black, openly to advocate the adoption of or vote for" the constitution, "owing to the hostile feeling of the white people who were opposed to said instrument" (LA General Assembly 20). Taylor found, in the Warmoth Papers, "that many blacks of Claiborne Parish were kept from the polls by threats that they would be driven from their homes" (158).

In early 1868, the Democratic Party appeared to be gaining ground in the North. Consequently, the "mood of white Louisiana became [even] more belligerent." It seemed as if a Democratic president could be elected, and if that could happen, a swift end would come to Radical Reconstruction. Realizing that in a "fair election, the Democrats could not possibly carry Louisiana . . . [i]t was only natural, therefore, that determined Democrats should turn to force and fraud to achieve their ends." For Louisiana to elect

<sup>1</sup> For further illumination on the tension between and interwovenness of Creole heritage and race, and the role of "Creoles of color," see Rodolphe Lucien Desdunes, *Our People and Our History: Fifty Creole Portraits*, translated and edited by Sister Dorothea Olga McCants, *Daughter of the Cross* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana UP, 2001).

Seymour, "every possible Democratic vote had to be cast, and a large number of Negroes had to be persuaded or coerced to vote Democratic or stay at home on election day. . . . The planter class had always felt that it should be able to control the vote of its former slaves, and now it set out to do so." While economic intimidation was often enough, "white Louisianans did not hesitate to resort to violence in the summer and fall of 1868 . . . the pressure upon Negroes was constant. When Governor Henry Clay Warmoth spoke out against violence in August, he was castigated by the [press]" (Taylor 154-67). In the election held November 3, 1868, Seymour won in Louisiana.

Howard White has found evidence of this intimidation as well, identifying "persuasion, economic pressure, and terroristic methods [that] were used to intimidate Negro voters in 1868. . . . [L]awyers and doctors announced that they would refuse to serve Negro clients who voted Republican; . . . planters made it known that they would neither hire them nor grind grist for them; and whites in New Orleans proposed a boycott of Radical Negro barbers, draymen, cabmen, and artisans" (149-50). In Claiborne Parish specifically, men armed and wielding notebooks and pencils threatened death to anyone recorded as favoring the Radical ticket, and this went on for months. The sheriff was cowed as well, and the authorities did nothing to stop the intimidation (Trelease 95).

This was the scene in which William Meadows lived, but there are few clues readily available in the standard sources to understand who he was. A poster of all the black members of the 1868 Constitutional Convention shows Meadows next to P. B. S. Pinchback, the de facto leader of their group. Was Meadows literally Pinchback's "right-hand man," as he seems to be portrayed in the poster, or is his placement there merely happenstance? The proceedings of the convention list Meadows in attendance at every session, and the tally of votes on each issue indicates his views. Beyond that, everything we currently know is found in one obscure state report, a report that one might never think of consulting—the *Report of the Joint Committee of the General Assembly of Louisiana on the Conduct of the Late Elections, and the Condition of Peace and Order in the State* (LA General Assembly).

The "Hon. William R. Meadows, colored, a member of the late Constitutional Convention, was murdered in his own yard soon after the election of 17th and 18th of April, 1868." The Joint Committee obtained much of its information from Brevet Major General Edward Hatch, Assistant Commissioner of the Freedmen's Bureau. Hatch, along with Major General O. O. Howard, Commissioner, was very helpful to the committee. Bureau officials, unlike their predecessors, Colonel Warren and Brevet Major General Buchanan (LA General Assembly 19). This illustrates a tension in place during this time, as described by John A. Carpenter: "The dispute is over the degree of intensity and seriousness of the atrocities. If they were as bad as the Radical Republicans maintained . . . then there was greater justification" for the involvement of the federal government in Reconstruction in the South. "Southerners could not be trusted to deal fairly with the freedmen and Unionists and furthermore were actively engaged in a program of oppression and violence against these groups. On the other hand, if the reports

of atrocities were either largely untrue or so grossly exaggerated that they deserved to be ignored, Congressional interference only made matters worse" (234–47). This tension over whether to accept the government's version of the situation during Reconstruction has lingered for many decades, despite the varying and sometimes extreme levels of racial violence of the ensuing years. Since we know racial violence to have been a reality in recent history, it is quite reasonable to now revisit these sources that were previously discounted as questionable, or possibly exaggerated, for political reasons.

The Joint Committee report contains sworn testimony. Melvin McDonald testified under oath before N. J. Scott, Justice of the Peace, that Meadows was shot three times on his way back to his house from the stable, about 50 yards away, where he had been feeding his horse. W. W. Bennett, MD, acting as coroner, examined Meadows and testified that he had three gunshot wounds, and either of the first two, one in the head, one in the heart, would have been enough to kill him (LA General Assembly 43–44).

Most poignant of all is the eyewitness testimony of Meadows' wife, recorded by William Stokes, Assistant Sub-Assistant Commissioner, Bureau R. F. and A. L., Clai-borne Parish. "I was out in the yard milking the cow when my husband passed going to the stable; my little son was with him; as soon as I was done I went into the kitchen with the milk; the kitchen is about 20 yards from the house; my little boy and his father were returning from the stable; my little boy turned off to come to me, and before he had reached the kitchen he heard someone call 'Meadows'; his father looked toward the kitchen, thinking it was I called him; at that moment he was shot; my boy saw him fall; he [was not] more than ten steps from his father when the first shots were fired; my boy is eight years old; I jumped out of the kitchen door and looked around at the men, and called for the gun; after I reached my husband they fired again, making three shots in all; I saw the guns in the men's hands; when I reached my husband he was dead; the men stood there and I asked them who they were, they made no answer" (LA General Assembly 44–45).

The wife's testimony indicates that the murder was purposeful, not random, as the shooter knew Meadows by name. This is a crucial detail, one to note. How likely is it that Stokes would have had political reasons to have the detail fabricated or planted in the testimony?

Her testimony continues. "It was just about dark; they were dressed in black clothes; I saw them plain enough to know they were white men; I think they wore black hats; their clothes all looked dark; my first impression was that one of them was Newton Glover . . . I think the other was John Taylor; I am not sure of him. This man Glover threatened to kill my husband some time before: the Glover family seemed to be very much against my husband, and were always trying to meddle with him in some way. Mr. Carter, f.m.c., told my husband ten days before he was killed, that Newton Glover said that he held my husband's life in his pocket, and if he did not leave in two weeks he would be killed. . . . My husband was five years away from me," she continued, "and served three years in the Federal army. The people refused to let him stay in

the country when he first returned from the war, and many said he was not safe" (LA General Assembly 44-45).

It is notable that Meadows' wife named white men as the shooters, because politics were complicated in the area, and conflict abounded that was political rather than racial. According to Joe Gray Taylor, there were both Negro Radicals and Negro Democrats, among whom differences were sometimes distinct and contentious (158). If Meadows was murdered by white men, his death occurred for racial or political reasons. If he was murdered by black men, his death could be interpreted as a manifestation of complex internal black politics, or some other conflict altogether.

The Joint Committee included a report by Captain Sterling, A.A.1. General, that described the complicated local politics in which Meadows was embroiled. Sterling conveyed the words of W. F. Blackman, a state senator-elect, who said that Meadows was the lead orator at a Republican Party meeting held in Homer. "The freedmen came into town with banners, and in martial array." Meadows fell into conflict with John L. Lewis, a white Republican from Minden. "Lewis was nominated for parish judge and accepted the nomination, and while speaking he was insulted by Mr. Newton Glover, who made a personal reflection on his character. Lewis threw a glass of water in Glover's face. Glover drew his pistol . . . and the sheriff arrested Glover." Glover was the man who had threatened Meadows' life shortly before the murder.

In just this one report from Sterling, we have Meadows in conflict with Lewis, who is in conflict with Glover, who is in conflict with Meadows, and the conflict does not end there. "Toward evening, at a gathering, Meadows made use of these words: 'I think any white man should be taxed until he could no longer hold his lands.' A Mr. Ewing was present, and a few angry words passed between him and Meadows. I do not know what they were except that Mr. Ewing called Meadows a liar, and eventually kicked Meadows." This, too, was not the last of Meadows' conflicts. "Meadows had a difficulty with a negro by the name of Frank; he went to Frank and told him [Frank] was harboring white men to kill him (Meadows). Frank denied it. I do not know what has become of Frank; he is not here now." There was also a report of a white stranger, who had served in the Union army, coming to town and asking Meadows' permission to stay overnight on his land, "a short distance from Mr. Shalrow's mills, near Homer." Meadows denied him permission, according to his wife, telling the man "he had no accommodations for white men." Most officials were on record, if at all, as favoring this anonymous stranger as the likely murderer (LA General Assembly 45-51).

The inclusion of Sterling's report lends credibility to the entire Joint Committee endeavor. By providing information that clouds the motive for Meadows' murder, the potential political advantage the Joint Committee could have allowed itself by making his murder look like simple racist violence is untapped. There is, however, the reality that no one was ever held responsible for Meadows' murder, despite the many leads and potential suspects. N. J. Scott, the justice of the peace, reported, "I measured the tracks found in the sand where the parties are supposed to have stood who murdered

Meadows. I retain the measure in my office." William Stokes concludes by saying that the "measure of the footprints in the sand, now in the office of Judge Scott, might give a good detective a clue, which followed up might lead to the detection of the party or parties." All indications are that this clue was left unpursued.

Trelease, in *White Terror*, has noted the value of the documents produced by state governments. "It was long customary to scoff at these reports or dismiss them as biased, as with the Congressional documents, but under the usual rules of historical evidence they must be taken seriously." In addition, federal and state governments have archives of unpublished material, such as governors' correspondence, that offer a potential cache of information about racial violence, the Klan and the efforts of the government to deal with it (525).

In the case of William Meadows, we must weigh the motive of the seated Louisiana General Assembly to report on the election violence, and consider whether it served them in any way to exaggerate the account of Meadows' murder. If Meadows' wife reports that the shooters were white, does that somehow reflect positively on the government? Certainly, the mention of the murder's taking place in front of their eight-year-old son makes the shooters seem crueler. Does this enhance the standing of the local government? If so, perhaps the account has been edited in some way. The additional reports, however, which describe the many people with whom Meadows had conflicts, lend credibility to the work by demonstrating that the Joint Committee did not limit its reporting to only those facts that would support their views. In any case, the state government of Louisiana provides an account to consider, an account that is a rich vein to mine. Indeed, biased or not, censored or not, exaggerated or not, the usefulness of documents produced by local governments will vary with the attitude and motives of the local people involved. The fact remains that these sources give us something to consider, something to analyze, something to deconstruct. We dismiss or ignore these sources at our peril; the danger is the possibility of overlooking a truth that has survived.

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# “Like Limbs from a Tree”: Home and Homeland in Caryl Phillips’ *Crossing the River*

BY KHALIAH MANGRUM

American history is longer, larger, more various, more beautiful, and more terrible than anything anyone has ever said about it.

—James Baldwin

In his novel *Crossing the River*, Caryl Phillips pieces together a history for the voiceless souls of years past. A people for whom full possession of body and mind, of labor and leisure remain a longed-for dream are granted the power of posterity through Phillips’ multilayered narration. Manning Marable argues that “reconstructing the hidden, fragmented past of African-Americans can be accomplished with a multidisciplinary methodology . . . an approach [he calls] ‘living history’” (xx). Phillips uses this very approach to fill in the spaces left blank by slave autobiography, abolitionist biography and historical account. Although a work of fiction, the novel serves as biography, autobiography and historical narrative, thus challenging the completeness of current historical record while providing an antidote for its lack.

This idea of “living history” is one that Phillips, in the tradition of Toni Morrison, seizes as a means of historical agency. He desires to write the story of those who have no voice, those whose lack of power puts them outside the annals of conventional history. He does so by discussing the politics of space, the physical reality by which all other life processes depend. For Phillips, the tragedy begins when one’s space becomes barren, when “crops failed” (*Crossing* 1). In essence, these “failed crops” are symbolic

representations of the descendants of the kidnapped Africans who were ripped from the soul of their homeland and often died (either spiritually or literally) in a physical (and social) space whose poisons uproot and destroy. However, the novel's view is not one of complete annihilation. Several times in the work, Phillips speaks of "sinking . . . hopeful roots into difficult soil" (1). Throughout the novel, he challenges us to imagine the journey of a people who, although outside the space of homeland, somehow carry forth the reality of home into an often dark and cold spiritual landscape.

This task of speaking for those who are silenced is one that threads through the bulk of Phillips' work. Indeed, he excels in writing "novel[s] that attempt historical reconstruction in order to interrogate and, possibly, rewrite the European record" (O'Callaghan 34). Although O'Callaghan was speaking of another of Phillips' novels, *Crossing the River* also "wears the mask of fiction" in order to "cast doubt on the very possibility of definitive historical construction" (34, 47). Chinosole further argues that "there is no strict delineation between history and fiction but a rough approximation of interpretive differences" (47). It is this murky area of "interpretive differences" that Phillips labors to make clear.

The novel begins by telling of a father in Africa who sells his children, Nash, Martha and Travis. The story of these characters spans 250 years, yet the "desperate father" of the first few pages lays claim to them all as they each suffer individual loss. Although time and circumstances make each unique, their commonality lies in the body/soul divide created via transatlantic slavery. The rather sci-fi treatment of time brings home the realization that the kidnapping of these Africans is, indeed, a generational reality that speaks to the present and future as much as it does to the past. We learn of Nash, a missionary and ex-slave sent to Liberia; Martha, a fugitive slave woman seeking her long-lost daughter; and Travis, an American GI who falls in love with a white Englishwoman during the Second World War. While telling the stories of three individuals "broken-off, like limbs from [the] tree" of home and homeland (2), the novel narrates the story of millions whose displaced voices ring through the centuries and into our present reality.

The first powerful pages of the novel detail the tearing away of three children from their home and homeland after being sold into slavery by their own father. The novel opens with a desperately short phrase and two equally brief sentences whose syncopated cadence mimics the cries of one rife with sorrow. The nameless narrator cries, "A desperate foolishness. The crops failed. I sold my children" (1). These three lines in their brutal candor and brevity strike the reader as offensive and so unbelievable as to be almost absurd, thus echoing the difficulty of many in grasping the full scale of complicity (among both Africans and Europeans) in the kidnapping, murder and enslavement of so many millions. A father hoping perhaps to stave off hunger and self-destruction delivered his children into the hands of a slave trader, severing them from himself and their place of origin and ensuring that home would forever be a tenuous and often uncertain destination. This nameless father's desperate act compares to that of Esau of the Old Testament, who

sold his inheritance for a mess of pottage. Those three lines appear again at the end of the two-page intro, couching the entire work in desperation, loss and atrocity.

The guilty father later uses language that alludes to the biblical Pilate, as well as to Shakespeare's *Lady Macbeth*. "I soiled my hands with cold goods in exchange for their warm flesh." Like his literary and historical predecessors, the owner of these "soiled hands" is subsequently haunted by the "chorus of a common memory" (1). He of the "soiled hands" represents those, white and black, responsible for separating millions of fellow human beings from their homeland and too often from one another.

In *The Atlantic Sound*, Phillips details the nature of the "cold goods" for which the father traded his children. He notes that "goods, be they guns, glassware, iron bars or liquor, would be exported from England to the West coast of Africa" (40). The exchange of "flesh" for "goods" marked a pivotal turn in the lives of the individuals kidnapped, as well as the lives of their descendants. In addition to hundreds of years of enforced slavery and the evils it entails, the descendants of these Africans, the fruit born of these "broken limbs," must bear the burden of a complicated and tenuous identity. Phillips writes of an experience he has when flying to Ghana with a native Ghanaian.

In our short time together I have listened to him sing a discordant anthem of indignation. Like me, he is the product of British imperial adventures. Unlike me, he is an African. A Ghanaian. A whole man. A man of one place. A man who will never flinch at the question, "Where are you from?" A man going home. (126)

Phillips' guilty father of *Crossing the River* proves a major catalyst in this break in identity and reappears at the end of the novel. He represents the nature of the rupture between Africa and those of the diaspora. Indeed, he asserts, "There is no return" (2), that a true homecoming is no longer attainable. The relationship between this father and his children, between Africa and its diaspora, is forever changed, changed utterly. This begs the question, is there a possibility of home, of homeland for the descendants of those who traveled the ocean toward bedlam?

In response to this question, *Crossing the River* complicates and rethinks the concepts of home and homeland. In this four-part epic spanning three centuries, a desperate father's "foolishness" demonstrates that "there is no strict delineation between history and fiction" (Chinosole 22). Both Nash, living in 19th-century Liberia, and Travis, an American soldier in 20th-century England, prefer to stay where they are rather than face the debilitating *homelessness* created by American slavery and the racism and discrimination it produces. So if home is not the place where one was born, what is it? What factors lead to the African diasporic subject's feeling "at home" even when torn from homeland?

In Phillips' novel, "home" exists as a loved and familiar physical space as well as a lifestyle and stance toward life. Travis, a young black man from the American South, walks down the street with a white woman he is romantically pursuing, an action that

would have been a self-inflicted death sentence in the place of his birth. Later in his story, he repeatedly warns Joyce, the woman he loves, that they can never live in the United States. Further, Nash, the Liberian missionary, notes that in Liberia, his blackness is not a stain of inferiority but a normative reality. He writes to his white benefactor, and ex-owner, "Africa should be a land of freedom, for where else can the man of color enjoy his liberty" (32). These men find a sense of home in the agency that their new social standing affords them.

However, for the descendants of those who unwillingly traveled the Atlantic to Europe and the New World, any notion of homeland will always possess a sense of doubleness, a division of self similar to W. E. B. Du Bois's idea of double consciousness. Du Bois writes:

The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife,—this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face. (*Souls* 4)

Valerie Smith also speaks of the doubleness experienced by the black diasporic subject as seen in the narrative of Olaudah Equiano, who, while praising the ideal qualities of Africa, and even in light of the violence of slavery, is grateful for the Christian religion that contact with Europeans afforded him. She writes, "Equiano's narrative retains a quality of doubleness that correlates with the complex interrelation between his origin and socialization" (13). We witness a similar divide with Nash, when he echoes Equiano by saying:

I was fortunate enough to be born in a Christian country, amongst Christian parents and friends, and that you [Edward, his ex-master] were kind enough to take me, a foolish child, from my parents and bring me up in your own dwelling as something more akin to a son than a servant. (21)

Being "taken" away from his birth family is the first fracture Nash experiences, and, like Equiano, he counts it as a blessing. When he is sent away from the country of his birth, however, he speaks favorably of Liberia as "a glorious asylum . . . under the protection of a wise God" (26). The word "asylum" is charged with political overtones of one who is in exile, a survivor fleeing a place of moral and physical perils. This use of language tells how Nash feels about the nature of his political and social standing in America. He later notes the respect and dignity given to him in Liberia that he did not

enjoy in the country of his birth:

In this republic the practice is to address me as *Mr. Williams* and not *Boy*. There are a few white people out here, and they are polite, moving to one side and touching their hats. In Monrovia, I have had occasion to call at their dwellings and to range over the subjects of the day, religious and otherwise. The white man never calls me by anything but my name. I am *Mr. Williams*. (32–33)

Marable asserts that there exists “a profound ambivalence about the entire political experiment commonly called ‘The United States of America’” (42) and notes the sense of “boundless hope and enduring hostility” this “experiment” induces. For what does it mean to be born into a place, to sacrifice one’s life’s blood, and that of one’s children, and not be a full citizen?

The difficulty of navigating physical notions of home and homeland are seen again in the second narrative of the novel. Martha Randolph, her husband, Lucas, and their daughter, Eliza Mae, are separated when the master of their plantation dies and his property, which includes the family of three, is auctioned off by the master’s nephew. “Slaves. Farm animals. Household furniture. Farm tools . . . are to be sold in this order” (76). Yet Martha held to her an autonomous identity born of love, of intimate familial connection. Even in the face of the greed-fueled travesty of the auction block, she “held on to some hope” that she would see her family, especially her daughter, again (78). Without this “hope,” this spiritual nourishment and shelter, she would, and does, die. This death is not only physical but spiritual and primarily social.

In his groundbreaking book *Slavery and Social Death*, Orlando Patterson speaks of the ways in which the degradation of the slave’s life led to a breakdown of community and personal autonomy, leaving one “socially dead.” After the loss of her own daughter, Beloved, Toni Morrison’s *Sethe* says, “My mind was homeless then,” suggesting that an individual’s understanding of home is just as much a relational as a physical reality (204). This divorce from self and others is exactly the fate that Martha struggles to escape. Sadly enough, *Sethe* and Martha’s plight has its mirror in the historical record. Harriet Jacobs hides in a crawl space for seven years rather than have herself, or her children, face the degradation of life as a mere possession. Much of what she does is for the sake of her children, her spiritual *home*, and unlike the typical Victorian narrative in which the white heroine ends up happily married, Jacobs’ “happily ever after” is her reunion with the children she lost to slavery. It is for love of their children that Martha and Jacobs endure unspeakable pain.

For many black enslaved heroines, love, like a river, carves out a home for the soul. Martha speaks of the essential nature of love. “[S]he wondered if freedom was more important than love, and indeed if love was at all possible without somebody taking it from her” (86). Yet the gross injustice of slavery often succeeds in destroying or deforming that

love. In Morrison's *Beloved*, Sethe speaks of why she killed her daughter: "[I]f I hadn't killed her she would have died" (236). The death of which Sethe speaks is the death of self that destroys not only the body but the mind and the soul as well. Sethe's strong love for her child led her to murder. Although Martha does not kill the girl wrongly taken from her, the separation does take its toll. Martha spends years obsessively looking for her daughter, and eventually goes insane. Without the love she seeks, her "mind was homeless," and is no longer confined by the boundaries of space and time. "[A]ssaulted by loneliness, and drifting into middle age without a family," Martha speaks of hearing voices at several times in the narrative (79).

However, home can be found in relationships other than those between parent and child, husband and wife. Ten years after she's sold, Martha runs away when faced with the possibility of being sold once again. An older woman, and subject to the economic imperatives of her master(s), Martha faces certain death. Knowing this, she runs west to Dodge to live with her friend Lucy, where she meets and loves a store owner named Chester. While with this man, Martha seizes the miracle of finding love and home, a relationship that parallels Sethe's with Paul D in *Beloved*. However, the brutal racism of four white men toting guns takes Chester's life. Not too long after, Martha's friend Lucy gets engaged and announces an impending move to California. After this, Martha slips into a deep and final lethargy.

Indeed, it is this series of ruptures, from child, from husband, from lover and friend, that leads to Martha's mental, social and physical demise. Before this final scene, Martha and the informed narrator share the burden of narration. There is but a small paragraph break and no grammatical shift between the two. This melding of voices mimics "the many-tongued chorus" spoken of by the guilty father (1). Indeed, the only reason that the narrator knows more about Martha (her name, history and innermost fears and desires) is that he/she/it has tapped into the power of the collective memory. Du Bois writes, "One thing is sure and that is the fact that since the fifteenth century these ancestors of mine had a common history; have suffered a common disaster and have one long memory" (*Dusk* 79).

Yet, in the final scene of her life, Martha's story is no longer told by herself or from the point of view of this "collective memory," but from that of a kind white woman who takes her into her home and cares for her. When the woman checks on her the following morning and finds her dead, she contemplates what name this elderly black stranger should be given in order to bury her. The sudden shift from an informed third-person narrative to a well-meaning but uninformed one highlights the difficulty of writing the stories of those we have never known. Despite her deep and seemingly sincere degree of empathy, the kind woman does not possess the tools necessary to represent Martha's life. Here Phillips highlights the ineffectiveness of purely objective biography as a means of reconstructing history.

This appraisal is highlighted by the section that follows Martha Randolph's narrative. Captain Hamilton, a white slave trader of the 1700s, keeps a travel journal in

which nameless human beings (chattel and crew) act and are acted upon without any attention paid to their autonomy as individuals. Curiously, one of the lines spoken by the timeless and desperate father, "2 strong man-boys, and a proud girl," is also written in Hamilton's 19th-century journal (124). However, the father speaks of these three as treasured human children, while Hamilton's notation is one of cataloging potential profit. Hamilton's reason for recording the events that took place on his ship is one of expediency. Again, Phillips makes clear the often ignored connections that slavery makes between people of different times, places and social castes. Hamilton later writes, "They huddle together, and sing their melancholy lamentations. We have lost sight of Africa" (124). Again this statement contrasts with those of the first page concerning the "many-tongued chorus" (1).

This problem of telling the story of those who speak no more or whose voices are limited by circumstance is not a new one. Smith writes, "In each stage of their history, the presence of an intermediary renders the majority of the [slave] narratives not artistic constructions of personal experience but illustrations of someone else's view of slavery" (9). However, all of the characters' "identit[ies] depend on [their] discovery of a narrative" (135).

The nameless father speaks of "the chorus of a common memory"(1). This chorus includes the millions, past, present and future, whose souls have lost their homes. Several of Toni Morrison's novels share a similar vision and, like *Crossing the River*, use flashbacks to employ a sort of fluid treatment of narrative time and place and, in doing so, create room for the members of this "common memory" to sing the dirge of the diasporic masses. Indeed, the narrator notes that "through some atavistic mist, Martha peered back east, beyond Kansas, back beyond her motherhood, her teen years, her arrival in Virginia, to a smooth white beach where a trembling girl waited with two boys and a man" (73). Later, after being separated from her family for several months, Martha hears "voices from the past. Some she recognized. Some she did not" (79). This experience is similar to that described in *Beloved*.

In Morrison's *Sula*, Milkman speaks of "some chord or pulse or information [he and his ancestors] shared" (296). For those of the African diaspora, "identity is a collective rather than an individual construct, and [is defined] in relation to a broad sense of history and community" (Smith 136). Sterling Bland also writes of the collective function of individual slave narratives. He argues, "In seeking to authorize a place for themselves fugitive slave narrators end up telling their own stories (and creating meaning) by essentially telling the stories of others; the individual life presented within the story is very much a function of the collective stories of all who contribute to the black experience" (160). Indeed, "[*Sula*] suggests the impossibility of creating an identity outside of social relations" (Smith 131). In both Phillips' and Morrison's novels, there seems to be a connection between identity and relationships with others, relationships built on varying levels of selfless love and mutual respect. Martha speaks of being "assaulted by loneliness . . . without a family" (79), and as the result of this lack eventually loses



her identity as Martha. When she embarks on a journey with a group of black pioneers heading west, Martha seeks not only an opportunity to "[prospect for a place where your name wasn't 'boy' or 'aunty' and where you could be a part of this country without feeling like you wasn't a part," but a community that helps make this vision possible. However, she fails in forging meaningful relationships with "these colored pioneers," and when she becomes deathly ill, her traveling companions drop her off in a town without money, food or shelter (*Crossing* 93). While in this town, Martha is nameless, lacking identity; no one calls her by name. It is only in her flashbacks that she has real relationships, and consequently a name and a home.

Martha's near-death flashbacks flesh out the notion of home that *Crossing the River* explores. Phillips writes that Martha "had a westward soul which had found its natural-born home in the bosom of her daughter" (*Crossing* 94). For Martha, home outside relationship is not a home worth having. This raises the question of whether it is possible to find a home without finding a love worth cultivating.

Wesley Kort argues that there are three distinct categories of space: cosmic, social and personal (150). I contend that in order for an individual to be securely *at home*, all three distinctions must be met. Consider Martha and how before the initial rupture, home included a stable plantation with a kind master (cosmic), a small and loving family (social) and an emotional space that allowed for love and tenderness (personal). In no case do I argue that Martha was content with the life of a slave. Instead, I offer the analogy of a small cottage with a modest fireplace and a dirt floor, swept clean, the cottage in which we find her most at home. This is the spiritual home in which she dwelt, a home with much wanting (freedom, dignity, autonomy), but home nonetheless. Stripped bare of all things that could make some conception of home possible, Martha becomes homeless, physically, mentally and spiritually.

The metaphor of a tree and its broken limbs first emerges when the "father consumed with guilt" tells his children they "are beyond" homeland and possess only the hope that they will "[sink their] hopeful roots into difficult soil" (2). Moments before Lucas tells Martha of their master's death, she "[heard] the crickets, their shrill voices snapping, like twigs being broken from a tree" (76).

Although the rupture from origin is violent, it does not mean automatic death. A type of life is still possible. The imagery of tree brings to mind not only the growth and possibility created from broken limbs but the reality of generational creation. More specifically, the father, as tree, produces limbs that are taken away from him and produces generations who in turn produce generations, thus creating the possibility of new birth and life. The goal, then, is to create a space of freedom where individuals like Martha and Nash are protected from the sort of soul evictions enslavement induces. This is the task toward which we struggle.

Manning states, "History is more than the construction of collective experiences . . . the architecture of a people's memory, framed by our shared rituals, traditions, and notions of common sense. It can be a ragged bundle of hopes, especially for those who

have been relegated beyond society's brutal boundaries" (1). Phillips blends fiction and historical record and does so through a myriad of perspectives. This blending works together toward a vision of truth, love and freedom that will provide a spiritual home for the many homeless souls of the diaspora.

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# An Appeal to the Citizens of Academe: Why David Walker and Nat Turner Belong in the Classroom

BY MARK R. CHEATHEM

At the beginning of a course on the black experience in America, I took an informal poll of my nine students, all of whom were history or social studies education majors. "How many of you have heard of David Walker?" No hands raised. "Nat Turner?" One hand tentatively went up. "Good. What is Nat Turner remembered for?" A shrug of shoulders. "Okay. What about Frederick Douglass?" Nearly all of the hands went up. "He was a former slave who wrote his autobiography," one particularly bright student confidently asserted. "Good," I responded. "Does Harriet Tubman ring a bell?" Heads nodded. "She founded the Underground Railroad" was one answer that, while not altogether accurate, received affirmation from the other students.

That the students knew who Douglass and Tubman were but not Walker and Turner is not surprising. I never heard the names of the latter two mentioned until I was in graduate school. Whether that was because of my southern origins, my lack of interaction with African-Americans before college or my own ignorance (or perhaps a combination) I do not know. After eight years of teaching undergraduate students in both Mississippi and New Hampshire, however, I am convinced, at the risk of setting up a straw-man argument based simply on my own anecdotal evidence, that most students have not a clue as to who these two men were and why they are important in understanding the history of race, nationalism and revolution in the United States. If you will indulge me, I would like to give a brief biographical sketch of each man's life, then give some of the reasons I believe they belong in the classroom.

Often ignored in American history, David Walker was, in many ways, one of the primary founders of the antebellum abolitionist movement. As with many southern African-Americans, the details of his childhood are largely lost to history. He was probably

born in 1796 in Wilmington, North Carolina; his mother was likely a free black and his father a slave. At some point, probably in the early 1820s, he headed north, eventually winding up in Boston, Massachusetts, in 1825. There he married, joined an African Masonic lodge and became a member of the May Street Church, a black Methodist congregation. Walker's association with the lodge and the church also introduced him to *Freedom's Journal*, the first black newspaper in the United States, and he became one of its principal agents in Boston. Additionally, he helped found the Massachusetts General Colored Association, an organization that looked to unite African-Americans in opposition to slavery and in favor of improving the quality of life for blacks.<sup>1</sup>

In September 1829, Walker's pamphlet *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* appeared in print. Subsequently published in three editions, Walker's work was, in the words of one historian, "one of the most neglected yet most important political and social documents of the 19th century." Calling the "coloured people of these United States . . . the *most wretched, degraded and abject* set of beings that *ever lived* since the world began," Walker channeled the frustration of his people into a call for action. Partly a denunciation of the institution of slavery and the racism that accompanied it, partly an endorsement of black resistance, *Appeal* was a rhetorical masterpiece.<sup>2</sup>

*Appeal's* preamble indicated the grounds upon which Walker would fight his written war against the southern slave system. He primarily centered his arguments on religious principles, historical examples and republican ideology. Article I, titled "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of Slavery," emphasized his belief that American blacks had suffered more insult and cruelty than even the Hebrews, God's chosen people. At least they had been enslaved "under *heathen Pharaoh*," Walker argued; his people had been enslaved and were being treated cruelly by the "*enlightened Christians of America*." Article III, "Our Wretchedness in Consequence of the Preachers of the Religion of Jesus Christ," lambasted the hypocrisy of American Christianity. Its white adherents would send missionaries across the world to convert foreign "heathen" before they would show mercy to their slaves at home, Walker wrote accusingly. Instead, they would rather "*beat a coloured person nearly to death, if they catch him on his knees, supplicating the throne of grace*."<sup>3</sup>

Some whites blamed Walker for inciting uprisings in North Carolina and Virginia. It is certainly possible that blacks in those states had heard of, if not read, *Appeal*. Its long-term influence on abolition, however, is unquestionable. Maria Stewart, Frederick Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, William Lloyd Garrison—all four prominent abolitionists (and many others) acknowledged the effect of Walker's pamphlet in

<sup>1</sup> The details of Walker's life given here can be found in Peter P. Hinks, *To Awaken My Afflicted Brethren: David Walker and the Problem of Antebellum Slave Resistance* (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 1997).

<sup>2</sup> David Walker, *David Walker's Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World*, ed. Peter P. Hinks (University Park: Pennsylvania State UP, 2000) xxv, 3.

<sup>3</sup> Walker 9–20, 23, 37–45.

galvanizing opposition to slavery. Historian Eric Foner has suggested that *Appeal* helped make immediate abolition the primary goal of the movement. Unfortunately for Walker, he died in 1830 before he could see the culmination of his influence.<sup>4</sup>

Better known to students of American history is Nat Turner. Born in 1800, Turner was a slave who, by his own account, from an early age was considered special by others. He supposedly was able to read without being taught and could relate events that had taken place before his birth. In his early 20s, Turner began to speak to his fellow slaves of his supernatural visions, which he believed told him of a significant event in which he would play an important role. In one vision, he recalled, "I saw white spirits and black spirits engaged in battle, and the sun was darkened—the thunder rolled in the Heavens, and blood flowed in streams—and I heard a voice saying, 'Such is your luck, such as you are called to see, and let it come rough or smooth, you must surely bear it.'" In another, the Holy Spirit informed Turner that he was to "fight against the Serpent, for the time was fast approaching when the first should be last and the last should be first." Three years later, in February 1831, the sign for which he had been waiting appeared: a solar eclipse. At that moment, Turner remembered, "The seal was removed from my lips, and I communicated the great work laid out for me to do."<sup>5</sup>

On Monday, August 22, Turner and his coconspirators killed their first whites. The initial victims were members of the Travis family on Turner's own plantation. They missed the Traveses' infant son, but later doubled back and smashed his head against a fireplace. From there, the rebels, probably numbering fewer than 20, moved from farm to farm. They killed most, but not all, they found. At some farms, noticeable resistance led Turner's men to bypass the residence, while inhabitants at others were spared intentionally or by oversight. Surprisingly, Turner personally killed only one individual, a young white woman named Margaret Whitehead. Her death came slowly, as Turner recalled: "After repeated blows with a sword, I killed her by a blow on the head, with a fence rail." As the morning sun rose, the number of victims grew to almost two dozen, and the number of rebels roughly doubled. Turner seemingly lacked a plan beyond wreaking havoc among whites in the countryside. There was some indication that the group intended to seize Jerusalem, the county seat, but its members never made it that far.<sup>6</sup>

By midmorning on August 22, word had spread that a slave rebellion was under way. White patrols organized and rode out to meet the rebels. Over the next two days, the rebellion petered out as white resistance increased. By the end of the month, at least 100 blacks, far more than had participated in the rebellion, had been killed in retaliation for the 58 whites killed on that fateful Monday. The rebels' deaths were often just as

<sup>4</sup>"Eric Foner on David Walker," accessed August 6, 2006; <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part4/4i2982.html>.

<sup>5</sup>The details of Turner's life can be found in Nat Turner, *The Confessions of Nat Turner and Related Documents*, ed. Kenneth S. Greenberg (New York: St. Martin's, 1996) and Kenneth S. Greenberg, ed., *Nat Turner: A Slave Rebellion in History and Memory* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003). The quotations given here are from Turner 46–48.

<sup>6</sup>Turner 50.

violent as those of their victims. Some were decapitated and had their heads placed on pikes at crossroads. Others were disemboweled and disfigured before and after death. The 60-plus blacks who made it to trial faced mixed fates. Eighteen were hanged, another 14 were exiled from Virginia and the rest were freed.

Nat Turner himself escaped capture and death by hiding in the area; he was not discovered and taken in until October 30. Over the next several days, he was interviewed about his role in leading the rebellion. Turner agreed to allow a local attorney named Thomas R. Gray to speak with him and write down his life story. The account that Gray recorded served to convict Turner, who was hanged on November 11. Gray's *Confessions of Nat Turner*, as it was titled, achieved a wide circulation, initially selling perhaps as many as 50,000 copies in three printings.

The influence of Turner's rebellion and published confession was significant in shaping white attitudes toward blacks and, consequently, the growing abolitionist movement. Reeling from the violence carried out by both blacks and whites, Virginians debated the place of slavery in their state. Thomas Jefferson Randolph, his namesake's grandson, introduced legislation calling for the gradual emancipation of the state's slaves. The legislature eventually refused to endorse Randolph's proposal, thus solidifying the institution's place in Virginia. Turner's rebellion also reminded white southerners that their slaves, and even their region's free blacks, might be conspiring to mimic the actions of "General Nat" and his followers.

The 1831 uprising also held import for the abolitionist movement. William Lloyd Garrison, the editor of the *Liberator* newspaper and an emerging abolitionist leader, did not condone the rebellion. He did, however, observe that Turner "deserves a portion of the applause which has been so prodigally heaped upon [George] Washington, [Simon] Bolivar and other heroes, for the same rebellious though more successful conduct." Robert Dale Owen warned white southerners that "a knowledge of the world's history, and man's nature, should teach them that there is a point beyond which oppression cannot be endured, and they ought to anticipate the horrors of the oppressor when that day shall come." Turner's rebellion seemingly made clear to white abolitionists in particular that violent revolt, while not the method they would have chosen, might be the only way to shake slaveholders free from their commitment to the institution of slavery. Indeed, they were right about the need for violence.<sup>7</sup>

Why are Walker and Turner important to introduce to students? Let us start with David Walker. His emphasis on the hypocrisy of American Christianity and republicanism provided an intellectual foundation for later abolitionists to build on, one that they used to good effect. For example, he wrote in Article IV of *Appeal*:

See your Declaration Americans!!! Do you understand your own language?  
Hear your language, proclaimed to the world, July 4th, 1776—"We hold  
these truths to be self evident—that ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL!!

<sup>7</sup> Greenberg 151–53.

that they *are* endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, *liberty*, and the pursuit of happiness!!” Compare your own language above, extracted from your Declaration of Independence, with your cruelties and murders inflicted by your cruel and unmerciful fathers and yourselves on our fathers and on us—men who have never given your fathers or you the least provocation!!!!!!<sup>8</sup>

By attacking the two tenets to which many, if not most, white Americans held, he challenged, as noted earlier, the very essence of what it meant to be both believers in the principles of equality and freedom as expounded by the New Testament teachings of Jesus and, as noted here, a people of liberty as laid out in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

Walker also criticized black slaves for allowing themselves to remain under the control of white masters. Article II, “Our Wretchedness in Consequence of Ignorance,” indicted, though with qualifications, African-American complicity in the slave and the freeman’s situation. Walker decried the “groveling servile and abject submission to the lash of tyrants” that existed among African-Americans, as well as the “ignorance . . . [that] gnaws into our very vitals.” Slaves in particular found themselves the victims of these two flaws, as they beat, spread malicious gossip about and deceived one another, “all to pacify the passions of unrelenting tyrants.” An observer of slaves “may see some of my brethren in league with tyrants, selling their own brethren into *hell upon earth*, not dissimilar to the exhibitions in Africa, but in a more secret, servile and abject manner. Oh Heaven! I am full!!! I can hardly move my pen!!!!” he cried upon reflection. Walker made it clear that these weaknesses, as offensive as they were to his sensibilities, were the result of the slave system. His chiding seemed not so much aimed at admonishing slaves for not pulling themselves up by the mythical bootstraps as calling for them to remember their commonality as oppressed people. In other words, what affected one of them affected them all.<sup>9</sup>

Nat Turner presents an even more complex case. His actions surpassed most common forms of slave resistance, which were usually passive (breaking tools or slowing down in the field) and individualistic (running away). As teachers, how do we interpret Turner? Was he the 19th-century equivalent of George Washington, Che Guevara, or Osama Bin Laden? Was he a terrorist, an insurgent, or a freedom fighter? Was he justified in leading the rebellion and, if so, how does that affect our views of other rebellions by oppressed peoples in more modern times?

Consider how we remember John Brown and his raid on the federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Brown is often hailed as helping generate such fear among southern whites, fear that their slaves were on the brink of rebellion, that the election of even the moderate Abraham Lincoln could only have led to secession and civil war. What

<sup>8</sup> Walker 78–79.

<sup>9</sup> Walker 21–36.

we should remember is that one reason Brown's raid was able to generate this fear was the memory of Nat Turner. It was the latter's rebellion that psychologically traumatized a generation of southern whites and made Brown's raid effective. In fact, one has to wonder why we celebrate the greatness of a failed slave rebellion by a white abolitionist, while seemingly ignoring the successful rebellion led by a black slave.<sup>10</sup>

Turner also reminds us that the black experience in the United States has had a radical bent, one that does not always sit well with mainstream society. In the classroom, how many times do we mention Booker T. Washington but ignore W. E. B. DuBois because of Du Bois's support of communism? Or how often do we laud Martin Luther King, Jr., but overlook Malcolm X because of his membership in the Nation of Islam? Are we simply reinforcing the post-World War II consensus school of historiography and its emphasis on commonality, when we should be emphasizing the diversity of history that challenges us to think critically about what constitutes a democratic nation and what defines racial equality?

I want to conclude with a few lines from T. D. Rice's song "Jump Jim Crow." This may seem an odd choice, quoting from a song used by a Jacksonian-era minstrel. I find it appropriate, though, given the antebellum era's fear of black resistance and our own modern unwillingness to engage our students in grappling with the changes and the means of change that men and women such as David Walker and Nat Turner sought. Despite using the language of the period, the words speak of a hope yet to be realized, one that depended upon both brains and brawn.

Should dey get to fighting,  
Perhaps de blacks will rise,  
For deir wish for freedom,  
Is shining in their eyes.

And if de blacks should get free,  
I guess dey'll see some bigger,  
An I shall consider it,  
A bold stroke for the nigger.

I'm for freedom,  
An for Union altogether,  
Although I'm a black man,  
De white is call'd my broder.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> See, for example, Manisha Sinha's recent review article "'His Truth Is Marching On': John Brown and the Fight for Racial Justice," *Civil War History* 52 (June 2006): 161-69.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted in John Strausbaugh, *Black Like You: Blackface, Whiteface, Insult & Imitation in American Popular Culture* (New York: Penguin, 2006) 93.



## Contributors and Abstracts

### Kenneth J. Blume

"The Talented Tenth and American Foreign Policy: African-Americans in the U.S. Diplomatic Corps, 1865–1914"

This paper concerns 24 African-American diplomats who served in Haiti and Liberia from 1865 to 1914. The diplomats—physicians, ministers, educators, attorneys, journalists—were respected as professionals and leaders, and described by W. E. B. Du Bois in *The Souls of Black Folk* as "conservative, careful leaders" of "larger vision and deeper sensibility." They demonstrated that there was dynamic African-American leadership long before the spotlight began to shine on Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois. The paper focuses on the contributions by these American diplomats to the historical record and the government's commitment to them in the post-Civil War era and then the government's retreat, denial and neglect of them in the 20th century that lasted until the civil rights era.

**Kenneth J. Blume** is Professor of History and Chair of the Department of Arts and Sciences at the Albany College of Pharmacy in Albany, New York. He is the author of the forthcoming *Sable Diplomats: African Americans in the U.S. Diplomatic Corps, 1865–1914*, and the *Historical Dictionary of U.S. Diplomacy from the Civil War to World War I* (2005), published by Scarecrow Press.

### Constance N. Brooks

"Muddy Waters: W. E. B. Du Bois and the Commemorative Controversy over His Hometown's Symbolic Landscape"

This paper examines a recent controversy in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, about public commemoration of native son William E. B. Du Bois. It explores issues such as public memory, racial politics, patriotism, regional and national identities and children's education. In the controversy, Du Bois is characterized both as an insider (a graduate of local schools and a source of pride) and an outsider (different in race and politics and a threat to the future). A close-up look at a local school-naming debate (Du Bois lost), the paper identifies tropes coming from all sides of the argument and ties pros and cons to the history of public commemoration of African-American men and women nationally.

**Constance N. Brooks** received her M.A. in cultural geography from Royal Holloway, University of London, in Surrey, U.K., in 2005. Her thesis was on the Du Bois com-

memmoration controversy described above. Her coursework at the University of London focused on research methods such as interviews, surveys and participant observations.

### David A. Canton

"Desegregating the City of Brotherly Love: Raymond Pace Alexander and the Civil Rights Struggle in Philadelphia"

Raymond Pace Alexander (1898?–1974) was a prominent New Negro lawyer, a graduate of Harvard Law School and the first African-American to be a judge on the Common Pleas Court in Philadelphia. He filed many desegregation lawsuits in Philadelphia involved with housing, jobs, education, health care and public accommodations. While most civil rights scholarship examines the southern struggle for civil rights, recently historians have been exploring the civil rights struggle in the North. Alexander was one of the New Negro lawyers who led the struggle in northern cities. There are many similarities in the civil rights struggle in the North and the South, but Philadelphia was unique because it was a northern city with southern race relations. In the 1920s, for example, there were Jim Crow signs in downtown restaurants. By the 1930s, Philadelphia had the third largest black population in the U.S. and had far fewer black lawyers when compared with New York or Chicago.

David A. Canton is the Jacob and Hilda Blaustein Assistant Professor of History at Connecticut College in New London, Connecticut. His Ph.D. dissertation examined Judge Raymond Pace Alexander's struggle and lifetime pursuit of equal status and justice. Of note for this conference are other articles and conference papers by Professor Canton: "The Origins of a New Negro Lawyer, 1898–1923" in the *Western Journal of Black Studies* in 2003; "The New Negro Generation and the Origins of the Modern Civil Rights Movement, 1920–1960," November 2005; and "W. E. B. Du Bois and the Cultural Impact of Desegregation" for the National Council of Black Studies, New Orleans, Louisiana, March 2005. He is coauthor with Troy D. Allen of "The Souls of Black Folk—The Price of Admission: *Brown v. Board of Education*: A Du Boisian Retrospective" in *Life After Brown 2005: With All Deliberate Speed: Looking Back and Moving Ahead*, Keystone Digital Press, forthcoming.

### Mark R. Cheatham

"An Appeal to the Citizens of Academe: Why David Walker and Nat Turner Belong in the Classroom"

This paper offers a much-needed rationale for including David Walker and Nat Turner in the African-American history classroom, as well as including them as part of the African-American legacy of Frederick Douglass, Harriet Tubman and

Sojourner Truth. Walker's pamphlet *Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World* has been credited with urging immediate abolition as the primary goal of the abolitionist movement. Nat Turner was a Virginia slave who in 1831 led one of the deadliest slave revolts in U.S. history and whose actions revitalized southern opposition to emancipation and showed abolitionists, such as William Lloyd Garrison, that violence might be a necessary tool in the struggle against slavery. Including David Walker and Nat Turner in the classroom helps students see the civil rights struggle as one not always conciliatory, not always nonviolent, not always willing to wait for whites to come to their senses, and gives a stronger foundation for the African-American leaders who followed them, including W. E. B. Du Bois, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Malcolm X.

**Mark R. Cheatham** is Assistant Professor of History at Southern New Hampshire University. Professor Cheatham is volume editor of a collection of original essays, *Jacksonian America, c. 1830–1860* for the ABC-CLIO series *Perspectives in American Social History*, edited by Peter Mancall, in progress. He is the author of *Old Hickory's Nephew: The Political and Private Struggles of Andrew Jackson Donelson*, part of the Southern Biography Series, edited by Bertram Wyatt-Brown, Louisiana State University Press, Spring 2007.

### Shawn Anthony Christian

"From Washington, D.C., to Mexico City: Migration in *The Big Sea* and *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name*"

This paper explores autobiographical works by Langston Hughes and Audre Lorde as "a shaping of a black self in words" (Henry Louis Gates). Hughes and Lorde write, respectively, in *The Big Sea* and *Zami* not only of a black self in words but also about the representations of a mobile black self whose identity is more fluid than fixed. Their respective travels, wanderlusts and migrations—in particular, to Washington, D.C., and Mexico—provide a way to analyze the role of race and sexuality in identity reformation, and their autobiographies position migration as a constant renegotiation with place and a reimagining of self as well as an accounting of how place shapes identity.

**Shawn Anthony Christian** is Assistant Professor of English and African Studies at Wheaton College in Norton, Massachusetts. He has recently presented papers titled "Bearing the Weight of Inheritance: Susan-Lori Parks and Lorraine Hansberry's Black Family Dramas" and "(An) Engaging Black Readership: Cultivating the Younger Generation During the Harlem Renaissance." His article "Representing the Education of a Race: *A Voice from the South*, *Up from Slavery* and *The Souls of Black Folk*" is under review.

### Joseph R. Fitzgerald

"From the Bible to the Bullet: Five Women's Fights Against White Supremacy"

The black-liberation struggle has required blacks in this country to use propaganda and petitions to argue for their freedom from racial oppression. Blacks also use other antiracist tools, such as moral suasion and armed self-defense, to secure their safety and freedom. Five black women in particular exemplify this multifaceted black-liberation struggle: Ida B. Wells, Ella Baker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson and Gloria Richardson.

Using published biographies of Wells, Baker, Hamer and Smith Robinson, as well as his biography of Richardson (unpublished), Mr. Fitzgerald shows how these human rights activists/intellectuals sought to overthrow white supremacy. In particular, he illustrates how their socioeconomic status, religiosity, circles of family and friends, communities and economic and political philosophies impacted the black-liberation struggle and ultimately how the struggle benefited and continues to benefit from their activism. He also shows that these women are excellent role models for current social-change activists, such as those in the gay and lesbian and antiglobalization movements.

**Joseph R. Fitzgerald** is Assistant Professor of History at Gloucester County College, New Jersey. His biography of Gloria Richardson, *Days of Wine and Roses: The Life of Gloria Richardson*, was his Ph.D. dissertation, awarded by Temple University in 2005. Mr. Fitzgerald has taught at Drexel University, Empire State College and Cabrini College. In addition to extensive research on Gloria Robinson, he presented his paper "Interracial Organizing in Southern Unions During the Jim Crow Era" at the Race and Labor Matters Conference at CUNY, Brooklyn, in 2003.

### Diane Harriford and Becky Thompson

"W. E. B. Du Bois, Historical Memory and the Lessons of Katrina"

In late August 2005, the world witnessed the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina on the Louisiana coast and the Mississippi Delta—images of hundreds of people drowning, water obliterating entire neighborhoods. These images conjured up many other images of the Middle Passage, the monthslong journey that brought Africans to the Americas and to slavery. This paper shows how Katrina tapped into historical memory. Also examined is W. E. B. Du Bois's 1903 foundational concept of "double consciousness" and its relevance to illuminating connections between slavery and Katrina. Historically, this consciousness has tied black people to their history and to one another, as well as providing a spiritual foundation that has been crucial in coping with socially induced trauma. Also identified are the ways that consumerism

and individualism, contemporary social forces, have weakened double consciousness and compromised black solidarity and accountability in the face of social inequities. Looking further into the effects of Katrina, the authors explore historian Darlene Clark Hine's concept of the "culture of dissemblance," the complicated ways that gender shapes blacks' responses to trauma and Gloria Anzaldúa's concept of "mestiza consciousness," a way to understand trauma from a multiracial perspective.

**Diane Harriford** is Associate Professor of Sociology at Vassar College. For the past 20 years she has been teaching sociology, women's studies and African-American studies while maintaining an active commitment to several social-justice movements. She is currently Director of Women's Studies at Vassar College and a former chair of the Sociology Department. Diane has spoken widely on women and the labor movement, on black women and sexuality, on black political formations and, most recently, on the rise of black conservatives in the United States.

**Becky Thompson** is Associate Professor of Sociology and African-American Studies at Simmons College. She has held academic appointments at Duke, Wesleyan, Princeton, Bowdoin and the University of Massachusetts. She has been an active speaker on antiracist activism, trauma and embodiment and multiracial alliance building nationally and internationally for the past 20 years. Her most recent book, *A Promise and a Way of Life*, is the first social history of contemporary white antiracism in the United States.

Their presentation is from a chapter of their forthcoming text, *When the Center Is on Fire: Passionate Social Theory for Troubled Times*, to be published by the University of Texas Press.

### David J. Langston

"Transforming Space into Time: Narratives of Place in *The Souls of Black Folk*"

Evoking a "spirit of place" has been a staple of human thinking for any society for which we have records; that is, using the names of geographical locations to function as a "title" for values, truths or stories around which a society constructs its social practices. Examples such as "Valley Forge," "Birmingham" or the "World Trade Center" are contemporary instances. For older cultures, including the ancient Romans and the Apaches of the Southwest, places have represented traditional values and/or wisdom or cultural ideas. W. E. B. Du Bois's widely shared idea of "spirit of place" defines a spatial notion that intersects with "narrative," a temporal one, in his seminal work *The Souls of Black Folk*. In that book, Du Bois develops the notion of place to include complex, transformative, historical events, such as education, voting and social integration, not as symbols for permanent values but ones to which

each place must bear witness so as to enable freedmen's sons and daughters to be recognized on American soil.

**David J. Langston** teaches literature, film and critical theory at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts, where he directs the Honors Program and also serves as chairperson of the Commonwealth Honors Program of Massachusetts. He has a long-standing professional interest in how space and time intersect, compete or complement each other in various representational regimes.

### David Levering Lewis

"The Invention of Place in the Du Boisian Canon"

This paper was the keynote speech for the Shaping Role of Place in African-American Biography conference on September 16, 2006. Lewis sets the tone for the conference by talking about W. E. B. Du Bois and his construction of place during his lifetime. It focuses on three important junctures in Du Bois's life—his childhood in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, his first teaching stint in Wilson County, Tennessee, in 1886, and the second Pan African Congress in Brussels in 1921.

**David Levering Lewis** is the Julius Silver University Professor and Professor of History at New York University. He is the immediate past president of the Society of American Historians. His work reflects the mutual dependence of African and African-American history, as well as the utility of biography in the exploration of American race, class and politics. He is the recipient of fellowships from the MacArthur Foundation, the Guggenheim Foundation, the National Humanities Center and the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Professor Lewis is a winner of the Bancroft Prize, the Parkman Prize and the Ralph Waldo Emerson Award. His two volumes on the life of W. E. B. Du Bois won the Pulitzer Prize, the only time in the history of the award that both volumes of a biography have won. He received his Ph.D. from the London School of Economics and Political Science, his M.A. from Columbia University and his B.A. from Fisk University.

### Khaliah Mangrum

"'Like Limbs from a Tree': Home and Homeland in Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River*"

This paper is a critique of Caryl Phillips' *Crossing the River*, a novel that shows the distinction between home and homeland and analyzes the politics of space. The novel is divided into three sections, each of which follows the journey of a character through a particular place and a historical era. Phillips has written about characters

who have no voice and no power by discussing the politics of space, the physical reality on which all other life processes depend. For Phillips the tragedy begins when one's space becomes barren, when "the crops fail." In essence, these crops are the descendants of the kidnapped Africans who have been ripped from their homeland and who often die spiritually or literally in a physical and social space that concocts poisons that uproot and destroy.

**Khaliah Mangrum** is completing a master's program in English at California State University. She received her B.A. in English in 2001 from the University of California, Berkeley. Her thesis was titled "The Nature of Mothering in Colonial Communities as Seen Through the Work of Jamaica Kincaid."

## Dinah Mayo-Bobee

"Searching for Ambrose: Genealogy, Biography and African-American Place in the Historical Narrative"

Genealogical research establishes personal connections with the past, giving individuals and families a sense of place and history. This paper examines the process of reconstructing personal histories and placing them in the context of significant historical events. Through the lives of Ambrose McCaskill (1844–1920), a subsistence farmer born in antebellum South Carolina, and his descendants, this examination demonstrates how it is possible to construct African-American biographies within the historical narrative. In addition to describing research methodology, findings and available resources, the paper suggests ways to look at the forces that shaped the lives of African-Americans and to understand how these forces informed their responses to major events in American history. In its entirety, the exploration of Ambrose and his family across four generations underscores the importance of genealogical studies and how they contribute to historical interpretation and our ever-expanding knowledge of African-American culture, place and contributions to history.

**Dinah Mayo-Bobee** was awarded a Ph.D. in U.S. History from the Department of History at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, in May 2007. The title of her dissertation is "'Something Energetic and Spirited': Massachusetts Federalists, Rational Politics, and Political Economy in the Age of Jefferson, 1805–1815." Other papers and publications include "William H. Seward" in the *Encyclopedia of African American History, 1619–1895: From the Colonial Period to the Age of Frederick Douglass*, edited by Paul Finkelman, Volume 3, New York: Oxford University Press, 2006; and "The Patriot: Historic Memory, Cinematic Interpretation, and the Historian's Critique," in *Proceedings of the Center for the Study of the Korean War 4* (July 2004): 139–60.

## **Nancy Ladd Muller**

"From the Particular to the General: Teaching the 'Race Concept' Through a Du Boisian Philosophical Lens"

The pedagogy of restoration is admirable, and replacing African-Americans on the social landscape of the American Republic is a historical imperative. However, is this enough? This paper poses the necessity of reframing this rerepresentation using W. E. B. Du Bois's philosophical approaches to finding the truth, which in turn demonstrates the fallacy of the "race" concept.

**Nancy Ladd Muller** is a professor of sociology at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts and teaches in the Department of Journalism at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, from which she received her Ph.D. The title of her dissertation was "W. E. B. Du Bois and the House of the Black Burghardts: Land, Family, and African Americans in New England." Her current concentration is Africa and the African diaspora.

## **Jan Voogd**

"The Life and Death of William Meadows: Local Government Documents as Sources for Biography"

The role of place in shaping African-American biography can be a very direct one. This paper explores the murder of William Meadows, a former slave and a representative to Louisiana's Constitutional Convention in 1868, and the attention the Louisiana General Assembly devoted to it. The year after the convention, Meadows was shot and killed at his home in front of his family. The details of the tragedy, including the eyewitness testimony of his wife, were captured in a state-government publication at the time, published by the General Assembly of Louisiana. A committee investigating the conduct of the elections recorded information about Meadows' murder, thereby ensuring that the details became part of the public record. By exploring the story of William Meadows and the attention the Louisiana General Assembly devoted to it, this paper demonstrates the powerful role a particular place can have in the shaping of African-American biography.

**Jan Voogd** is Head of Collection Management for the Social Sciences Program at the Harvard College Library, Harvard University. Among the many papers she has presented are "Thousands of Negroes Leave Omaha: Race Relations in the U.S. West in the Red Summer of 1919" at the 44th Annual Meeting of the Western History Association, October 2004, in Las Vegas, and "Red Summer, 1919" at the International Conference on Lynching and Racial Violence: Histories and Legacies, October 2002, at Emory University.





# THE MIND'S EYE

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